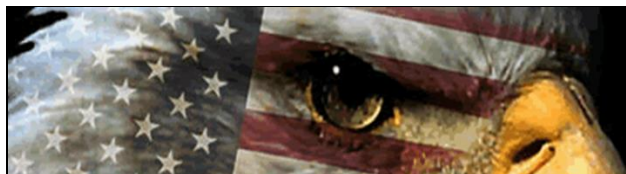



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	10/20 CDC ACIP: Covid shots on vax schedules
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-cdc-advisers-approve-adding-covid-shots-vaccine-schedules-2022-10-20/
GIST	Oct 20 (Reuters) - The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advisory committee on vaccines on Thursday approved adding COVID-19 vaccines to the agency's recommended immunization schedules for both children and adults.

The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted unanimously to add the vaccines to the schedules, which contain recommendations to physicians on which shots their patients should receive and when.

Several committee members stressed that they were not setting a requirement for anyone to receive the shots.

The CDC has recommended that Americans over 6 months of age should receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

Some parents and doctors who are against COVID-19 vaccine mandates have expressed concerns during public comments at the meeting and on social media that adding the shots to the U.S. CDC schedule will encourage state regulators to require them for public school attendance.

"Adding the COVID-19 vaccine to the recommended childhood immunization schedule does not constitute a requirement that any child receive the vaccine," said Dr. Nirav Shah, an ACIP member and Director of Maine's Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Shah noted that there are currently vaccines on the schedule, such as seasonal flu shots, that are not required for school attendance in many places.

"The decision around school entrance for vaccines rests where it did before, which is with the state level, the county level and at the municipal level," Shah said.

The CDC stressed that the annual schedules reflect recommendations already approved by ACIP and do not reflect new policies.

On Wednesday, ACIP recommended that COVID-19 shots become part of the CDC's vaccine program for children, which provides many types of free inoculations to millions of kids each year.

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HEADLINE	10/21 Online schools put US kids behind
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/online-school-covid-learning-loss-7c162ec1b4ce4d5219d5210aac8f1ae?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=TopNews&utm_campaign=position_07
GIST	<p>BOSTON (AP) — Vivian Kargbo thought her daughter's Boston school district was doing the right thing when officials kept classrooms closed for most students for more than a year.</p> <p>Kargbo, a caregiver for hospice patients, didn't want to risk them getting COVID-19. And extending pandemic school closures through the spring of 2021 is what many in her community said was best to keep kids and adults safe.</p> <p>But her daughter became depressed and stopped doing school work or paying attention to online classes. The former honor-roll student failed nearly all of her eighth grade courses.</p> <p>"She's behind," said Kargbo, whose daughter is now in tenth grade. "It didn't work at all. Knowing what I know now, I would say they should have put them in school."</p> <p>Preliminary test scores around the country confirm what Kargbo witnessed: The longer many students studied remotely, the less they learned. Some educators and parents are questioning decisions in cities from Boston to Chicago to Los Angeles to remain online long after clear evidence emerged that schools weren't COVID-19 super-spreaders — and months after life-saving adult vaccines became widely available.</p> <p>There are fears for the futures of students who don't catch up. They run the risk of never learning to read, long a precursor for dropping out of school. They might never master simple algebra, putting science and</p>

[tech fields out of reach](#). The pandemic decline in college attendance could continue to accelerate, crippling the U.S. economy.

In a sign of how inflammatory the debate has become, there's sharp disagreement among educators, school leaders and parents even about how to label [the problems created by online school](#). "Learning loss" has become a lightning rod. Some fear the term might brand struggling students or cast blame on teachers, and they say it overlooks the need to save lives during a pandemic.

Regardless of what it's called, the casualties of Zoom school are real.

The scale of the problem and the challenges in addressing it were apparent in Associated Press interviews with nearly 50 school leaders, teachers, parents and health officials, who struggled to agree on a way forward.

Some public health officials and educators warned against second-guessing the school closures for a virus that killed over a million people in the U.S. [More than 200,000 children lost at least one parent](#).

"It is very easy with hindsight to say, 'Oh, learning loss, we should have opened.' People forget how many people died," said Austin Beutner, former superintendent in Los Angeles, where students were online from mid-March 2020 until the start of hybrid instruction in April 2021.

The question isn't merely academic.

School closures continued last year because of teacher shortages and COVID-19 spread. It's conceivable another pandemic might emerge — or a different crisis.

But there's another reason for asking what lessons have been learned: the kids who have fallen behind. Some third graders struggle to sound out words. Some ninth graders have [given up on school](#) because they feel so behind they can't catch up. The future of American children hangs in the balance.

Many adults are pushing to move on, to stop talking about the impact of the pandemic — especially [learning loss](#).

"As crazy as this sounds now, I'm afraid people are going to forget about the pandemic," said Jason Kamras, superintendent in Richmond, Virginia. "People will say, 'That was two years ago. Get over it.'"

When COVID-19 first reached the U.S., scientists didn't fully understand how it spread or whether it was harmful to children. American schools, like most around the world, understandably shuttered in March 2020.

That summer, scientists learned kids didn't face the same risks as adults, but experts couldn't decide how to operate schools safely — or whether it was even possible.

It was already clear that remote learning was devastating for many young people. But did the risks of [social isolation](#) and falling behind outweigh the risks of children, school staff and families catching the virus?

The tradeoffs differed depending on how vulnerable a community felt. Black and Latino people, who historically had less access to health care, remain nearly twice as likely to die of COVID-19 than white people. Parents in those communities often had [deep-rooted doubts](#) about whether schools could keep their children safe.

Politics was a factor, too. Districts that reopened in person tended to be in areas that voted for [President Donald Trump](#) or had largely white populations.

By winter, [studies showed schools](#) weren't contributing to increased COVID-19 spread in the community. Classes with masked students and distancing could be conducted safely, growing evidence said. President Joe Biden prioritized reopening schools when he took office in January 2021, and once the COVID-19 vaccine was available, some Democratic-leaning districts started to reopen.

Yet many schools stayed closed well into the spring, including in California, where the state's powerful teachers unions [fought returning to classrooms](#), citing lack of safety protocols.

In Chicago, after a six-week [standoff with the teachers union](#), the district started bringing students back on a hybrid schedule just before spring 2021. It wasn't until the fall that students were back in school full time.

Marla Williams initially supported Chicago Public Schools' decision to instruct students online during the fall of 2020. Williams, a single mother, has asthma, as do her two children. While she was working, she enlisted her father, a retired teacher, to supervise her children's studies.

Her father would log into his grandson's classes from his suburban home and try to monitor what was happening. But it didn't work.

Her son lost motivation and wouldn't do his assignments. Once he went back on a hybrid schedule in spring 2021, he started doing well again, Williams said.

"I wish we'd been in person earlier," she said. "Other schools seemed to be doing it successfully."

Officials were divided in Chicago. The city Department of Public Health advocated reopening schools months earlier, in the fall of 2020. The commissioner, Dr. Allison Arwady, said they felt the risk of missing education was higher than the risk of COVID-19. Others, such as the director of the Institute for Global Health at Northwestern University, advocated for staying remote.

"I think the answer on that has been settled fairly clearly, especially once we had vaccines available," Arwady said. "I'm concerned about the loss that has occurred."

From March 2020 to June 2021, the average student in Chicago lost 21 weeks of learning in reading and 20 weeks in math, equivalent to missing half a year of school, according to Georgetown University's Edunomics Lab, which analyzed data from a widely used test called MAP to estimate learning loss for every U.S. school district.

Nationally, kids whose schools met mostly online in the 2020-2021 school year performed [13 percentage points lower](#) in math and 8 percentage points lower in reading compared with schools meeting mostly in person, according to a 2022 study by Brown University economist Emily Oster.

The setbacks have some grappling with regret.

"I can't imagine a situation where we would close schools again, unless there's a virus attacking kids," said Eric Conti, superintendent for Burlington, Massachusetts, a 3,400-student district outside Boston. His students alternated between online and in-person learning from the fall of 2020 until the next spring. "It's going to be a very high bar."

Dallas Superintendent Stephanie Elizalde initially disagreed with the Texas governor's push to reopen schools in the fall of 2020. "But it was absolutely the right thing to do," she said.

Some school officials said they lacked the expertise to decide whether it was safe to open schools.

"Schools should never have been placed in a situation where we have choice," said Tony Wold, former associate superintendent of West Contra Costa Unified School District, east of San Francisco. "With lessons learned, when you have a public health pandemic, there needs to be a single voice."

Still, many school officials said with hindsight they'd make the same decision to keep schools online well into 2021. Only two superintendents said they'd likely make a different decision if there were another pandemic that was not particularly dangerous to children.

In some communities, demographics and the historic underinvestment in schools loomed large, superintendents said. In the South, Black Americans' fear of the virus was sometimes coupled with mistrust of schools rooted in segregation. Cities from Atlanta to Nashville to Jackson, Mississippi, shuttered schools — in some cases, for nearly all of the 2020-2021 school year.

In Clayton County, Georgia, home to the state's highest percentage of Black residents, schools chief Morcease Beasley said he knew closing schools would have a devastating impact, but the fear in his community was overwhelming.

"I knew teachers couldn't teach if they were that scared, and students couldn't learn," he said.

Rhode Island was an outlier among liberal-leaning coastal states when it ordered schools to reopen in person in the fall of 2020. "We can't do this to our kids," state education chief Angélica Infante-Green remembers thinking after watching students turn off cameras or log in from under blankets in bed. "This is not OK."

But in the predominantly Latino and Black Rhode Island community of Central Falls, more than three-quarters of students stayed home to study remotely.

To address parent distrust, officials tracked COVID-19 cases among school-aged Central Falls residents. They met with families to show them the kids catching the virus were in remote learning — and they weren't learning as much as students in school. It worked.

Among teachers, there's some dispute about online learning's impact on children. But many fear some students will be scarred for years.

"Should we have reopened earlier? Absolutely," said California teacher Sarah Curry. She initially favored school closings in her rural Central Valley district, but grew frustrated with the duration of distance learning. She taught pre-kindergarten and found it impossible to maintain attention spans online.

One of her biggest regrets: that teachers who wanted to return to classrooms had little choice in the matter.

But the nation's 3 million public school teachers are far from a monolith. Many lost loved ones to COVID-19, battled mental health challenges of their own or feared catching the virus.

Jessica Cross, who taught ninth grade math on Chicago's west side at Phoenix Military Academy, feels her school reopened too soon.

"I didn't feel entirely safe," she said. Mask rules were good in theory, but not all students wore them properly. She said safety should come before academics.

"Ultimately, I still feel that remote learning was really the only thing to do," Cross said.

A representative from the American Federation of Teachers declined in an interview to say whether the national union regrets the positions it took against reopening schools.

"If we start to play the blame game," said Fedrick Ingram, AFT's secretary-treasurer, "we get into the political fray of trying to determine if teachers did a good job or not. And I don't think that's fair."

Regrets or no, experts agree: America's kids need more from adults if they're going to be made whole.

The country needs “ideally, a reinvention of public education as we know it,” Los Angeles Superintendent Alberto Carvalho said. Students need more days in school and smaller classes.

Short of extending the school year, experts say intensive tutoring is the most efficient way to help students catch up. Saturday school or doubling up on math or reading during a regular school day would also help.

Too few school districts have made those investments, Harvard economist Tom Kane said. Summer school is insufficient, Kane says — it’s voluntary, and many parents don’t sign up.

Adding school time for students is politically impossible in many cities. In Los Angeles, the teachers union filed a complaint after the district scheduled four optional school days for students to recoup learning. The school board in Richmond rejected a move to an all-year school calendar.

There are exceptions: Atlanta extended the school day 30 minutes for three years. Hopewell Schools in Virginia moved to year-round schooling last year.

Even the federal government’s record education spending isn’t enough for the scope of kids’ academic setbacks, according to the American Educational Research Association. Researchers there estimate it will cost \$700 billion to offset learning loss for America’s schoolchildren – more than three times the \$190 billion allocated to schools.

“We need something on the scale of the Marshall Plan for education,” said Kamras, the Richmond superintendent. “Anything short of that and we’re going to see this blip in outcomes become permanent for a generation of children — and that would be criminal.”

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HEADLINE	10/20 Iran crackdown protests has economic toll
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/iranian-crackdown-on-protests-imposes-economic-toll-11666286910?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>The Iranian government’s crackdown on the weekslong protest movement is taking a growing toll on the country’s sanctions-pummeled economy, hitting a broad swath of ordinary citizens, as authorities’ slowdown of the internet has choked vital payment channels for businesses.</p> <p>So far, Iran’s internet restrictions have cost the IT industry and businesses around \$24 billion, according to a member of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Farzin Fardis, cited by the reformist-affiliated news outlet Entekhab. Mr. Fardis also said that over the past month, up to 700,000 shops selling goods through the social-media app Instagram had closed down.</p> <p>Since the unrest erupted in September, Iranian authorities have shut down the internet in certain areas, and slowed down the speed in others, a tactic the government has used in recent years to prevent protesters from organizing through social media and spreading information to the outside world about the crackdown by security forces.</p> <p>Sparked by the death of a young woman arrested for allegedly violating the country’s dress code for women, the protests are propelled by young Iranians, particularly women and girls, some as young as high-school students who have called for more freedoms and an end of the country’s Islamic system of governance.</p> <p>The economic damage wrought by the government’s own suppression of dissidents undermines promises by President Ebrahim Raisi who during his election campaign last year pledged to create one million jobs to improve Iran’s economy. Coupled with domestic mismanagement, American sanctions have severely battered Iran’s economy, slashed its GDP, driven up its public debt and helped undermine the national currency, the rial.</p>

	<p>Lawmaker Jalal Mahmoudzadeh on Wednesday criticized Mr. Raisi for not delivering on his election promises and called for the ouster of the telecommunications minister for the internet shutdowns.</p> <p>“One of Mr. Raisi’s electoral slogans was: ‘We won’t let people face internet problems,’” Mr. Mahmoudzadeh said, according to the Jamaran news site. “The telecommunication minister should have been impeached.”</p> <p>Middle-class Iranians and businesspeople are likely to bear the brunt of the economic damage.</p> <p>The deputy head of Iran’s chamber of commerce, Hossein Selahvarzi, warned last week that the filtering of internet services would lead more Iranians to leave the country and decrease investment, according to the reformist newspaper Mardomsalari.</p> <p>“If the government decides that providing economic welfare for a majority of Iranians is not a political priority, then the threshold for this kind of economic cost that the state is willing to tolerate is going to be much higher,” said Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj, chief executive officer of Bourse & Bazaar Foundation, a London-based think tank focused on the Iranian economy. “That also means that the protests need to be much larger and sustain for longer to impose the cost necessary to achieve their goals,” he said.</p> <p>Mr. Raisi on Wednesday called on authorities to promote Iran’s domestic internet, which only allows access to national websites. His communications minister, Issa Zarepour, proposed criminalizing the use of virtual private networks, which many Iranians—including officials—use to access blocked websites. State media later amended Mr. Zarepour’s remarks, saying he had meant that the sale of VPNs, not the use of them, should be subject to prosecution.</p> <p>Either way, previous experience indicates that moving Iranians onto the national internet is unlikely to solve the economic problems for businesses.</p> <p>In November 2019, when Iranian authorities disconnected the country from the global internet for a week and forced Iranians to use only the national internet, the country lost roughly \$3 billion in internet payments compared with the month before, according to calculations based on statistics from Iran’s central bank. A total internet shutdown costs Iran an estimated \$37 million a day, according to internet monitor Netblocks.</p> <p>The closures of online trade in particular affect women who only make up about 14% of the country’s official labor force, according to the United Nations, but have gravitated toward informal jobs in internet businesses, such as online shops and language teaching.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Ukraine improvises aging air defenses
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/20/air-defenses-ukraine-missiles-russia/
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — Dmytro Shumskyi stood in the middle of the field in northern Ukraine with the Stinger air defense missile perched on his shoulder. “It’s coming!” his comrades yelled from behind him. Through the clear-blue sky, a small black streak flew past, followed by a loud whoosh — part of a barrage of missiles earlier this month that Russia said was retaliation for an attack on the Crimean Bridge.</p> <p>Shumskyi waited for the telltale crack and squeal of the Stinger and then launched his missile at the Russian one now in the distance. Behind him, his fellow Ukrainian soldiers yelled profanities, willing the enemy’s weapon to fall.</p> <p>Something flashed on the horizon, followed by a cloud of smoke from the explosion — success on a nearly impossible shot. Stingers are short-range missiles typically used against lower, slow-moving targets such as helicopters. Shumskyi took out two missiles with them. He was quickly heralded as a hero, having probably saved civilian lives that day.</p>

But with Moscow stepping up its air campaign, targeting Ukrainians and critical infrastructure far from the front line, Shumskyi was also a symbol of the dire, ragtag state of Ukraine's air defenses.

"Right now, our air defense is literally a guy with a Stinger," said Daria Kaleniuk, the executive director of the Anti-Corruption Action Center in Ukraine. Kaleniuk has been meeting with Western politicians to advocate for Ukraine to receive modern fighter jets and other weapons.

NATO powers supporting Ukraine — furious over Russia targeting facilities that provide heat, electricity and water to civilians — have promised to rush sophisticated air defenses to the country in response to Russia's shift in tactics. Washington said it would expedite its shipment of two air defense systems known as NASAMS; six more will be delivered over a longer time frame. Germany has pledged four IRIS-T systems.

But in some ways they are already too late. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had been pleading for air defense assistance virtually from the start of the nearly eight-month-old war.

On Oct. 10, Russia launched 83 missiles at Ukraine. Forty-three were shot down, but the 40 that landed caused death and destruction throughout the country.

Amid Russia's bombardments, Ukraine's air defenders have been forced to get creative. Last week, a meme was widely shared by Ukrainians on social media: people thanking God for peaceful skies above a photo of a man with an unamused expression meant to represent a soldier in Ukraine's air defense forces who had worked 36 hours straight.

Capt. Volodymyr Klymin, a deputy battalion commander working with S-300 surface-to-air missile systems in the Kyiv region, said that he found the meme funny but that in reality soldiers work in short shifts to stay fresh and alert.

The challenge for Ukraine's air defenses is not about hitting incoming missiles once they are spotted and the system locks on them. Klymin said his unit, for example, has never missed. The problem is that Ukraine does not have enough air defense units to cover every part of the country.

"There are some Russians who are not stupid and know how to think," Klymin said. "And so they're trying to get around our air defense systems by using the landscape or intelligence about where we're located. They're trying to beat us, too. But if the system sees the target and locks in on it, then it will shoot it down."

It's a chess match of sorts.

The locations of Ukraine's air defenses are constantly changed to better position them for missile routes the Russians might use. And then the Russians adjust in response. Ukraine's need for Western air defenses is to close the coverage gaps, especially with systems that can fire missiles at longer ranges. The S-300 missiles have a range of about 46 miles. The U.S.-provided NASAMS — the National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System — is a midrange system with radar that can see threats up to roughly 80 miles away.

At issue, too, is that most of Ukraine's systems date to the Soviet Union, meaning they are more than 30 years old in a best-case scenario. The NASAMS and the German-provided IRIS-T systems are much more sophisticated at locating targets, by integrating different sources of radar data and then engaging them, said Denys Smazhnyi, the chief of training for Ukraine's antiaircraft missile forces.

"We need to replace our old systems because they will simply not be able to cope with these threats soon," said Smazhnyi, who is abroad learning how to operate the NASAMS. "And we are running out of missiles."

In his nightly address Thursday, Zelensky singled out one of the country's air defense units and praised them for knocking down Russian missiles, including one headed for Kyiv.

“I would like to celebrate warriors from the 7th Anti-Aircraft Self-Propelled Artillery Battery of the 3rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Division of the 1,039th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment,” he said. “Thank you guys for the excellent service and consistently good results! Every downed Russian missile means saved lives of our people.”

The Ukrainians are so desperate to conserve precious surface-to-air rockets to counter Russia’s high-precision missiles that cause the most destruction that fighter jets have started scrambling to shoot down the many kamikaze drones Russia has started launching across the border.

One pilot took out five before he had to eject from his aircraft in the western Vinnytsia region, military officials said.

“Now aviation has proven to be an effective method against these drones,” said Yuriy Ignat, spokesman for Ukraine’s air force command. “But I don’t think there’s a way out of spending missiles on them. No matter what, we’re still going to use every resource we have today because it’s a high-precision weapon.”

The arrival of NASAMS is still weeks away, according to U.S. officials, and Smazhnyi said the training for Ukrainian soldiers getting on the system is half the time of a regular course. Until the NASAMS arrive, the Ukrainians will continue making do with what — and who — they have.

“Every fisherman needs to carry portable air defense systems with them,” Ignat joked. “After all, the Russians often fire their missiles low along rivers.”

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HEADLINE	10/20 Nigeria farmers: bandits, climate change
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/wxn7jq/nigeria-floods-bandits-farmers-herders-benue
GIST	<p>LAGOS, Nigeria – Chia Joy often had to wake before sunrise to make the journey to her rice farm under cover of darkness with her husband, Persoo. Sometimes, she needed to go in the dead of night.</p> <p>Joy, a 27-year-old mother of four, lives in a village in Gwer West in Benue, known as Nigeria’s food basket. She and her husband cultivated rice, which they sold for distribution across the country. It should have been a simple arrangement, but it wasn’t.</p> <p>The worsening security situation in Nigeria’s north – where armed herders, commonly referred to as bandits, have been battling farmers for increasingly scarce agricultural resources – meant every trip to her two-acre farm, taken by public transport, was fraught with danger. The bandits are responsible for thousands of deaths and the displacement of millions of people in the past decade.</p> <p>Early one morning in June this year, despite their caution, Joy and Persoo ran out of luck when a group of herders armed with guns and cutlasses invaded nearby farms. The couple fled their land, leaving their freshly planted yam and maize to die. They stayed away in another village until the end of July for their safety, but they were forced to return to plant rice, their major crop, under threat of immense danger.</p> <p>“We could not enter our farm boldly because if [the herders] caught you, it would not be funny. They destroy everything, everything we planted,” Joy told VICE World News.</p> <p>The couple were running massive losses, between 250,000-300,000 naira (£507-£608) a year since 2018, because they were unable to work the farm normally, but still they trudged on, regularly shuttling the 54 kilometres between Makurdi, the state’s capital, and Gwer West.</p> <p>This was until four weeks ago, when their farm was hit with flood waters. Now, there is nothing left.</p>

The flooding across Nigeria has killed 603 and displaced 1.4 million people, the worst in a decade, and has impacted 33 out of 36 states. In addition to the human toll, the floods have exacerbated the already shaky supply of food across the country of 206 million.

The poor security situation had curtailed farmers' capacity to produce food, causing food shortages and a spike in prices across the country, which have risen by more than 40 percent. Now, the floods have wiped everything away.

Climate change has caused rapid desertification in Nigeria, a rise in sea level and drought. As global temperatures continue to increase, all of these are expected to increase exponentially, and the farmers' plight will worsen.

"I am just confused right now, I don't even know what to do," Joy, who is traumatised by their loss, told VICE World News. She and the children are staying with her sister-in-law while her husband travels to look for work.

The scale of the flooding disaster in Nigeria is mind-boggling. One-third of Africa's most populous country is still underwater since the floods started in September, and the numbers of the dead and displaced continue to climb. In a single incident, a boat capsized while passengers were fleeing floodwater, killing at least 76 people in Anambra, in the south-east of the country.

Over 82,000 houses are believed to have been completely destroyed, along with 110,000 hectares of farmlands. Hundreds of communities across a dozen states have been cut off by floodwater for weeks, and are now completely inaccessible and without electricity and fuel.

The floods have compounded Nigeria's ailing economy, and billions of dollars are expected to be wiped off the steeply declining naira. The currency has lost 94.87 percent of its value over the past five years, and four out of every ten Nigerians live beneath the poverty line, according to the World Bank.

The climate crisis is compounding the precarious security situation in the north and Middle Belt regions of the country.

The gangs of "bandits", men from multiple, amorphous terrorist groups, and jihadist sects operating across the country's northern region, have killed 60,000 people in the past 10 years, according to the Centre for Democracy and Development. In the South, thousands of people have similarly lost their lives in attacks in the past decade.

Resources that the herders and farmers rely on have depleted in recent years due to expanding urbanisation and climate change, and the conflict has morphed into a more complicated cycle of violence between farmers and armed herders across the north of Nigeria.

Local communities in Kaduna, Kastina, Zamfara and other states have resorted to paying "taxes" to the terrorists, sometimes amounting to tens of millions of naira, to work on their farm and harvest their crops in peace.

Kwaghna Jerry does not have the luxury of security either. He operates a registered 20-acre farm growing rice and yams, in Gwer and is forced to live 60 kilometres away in Makurdi for safety.

On New Year Day in 2018, he went to harvest the crops he'd threshed the previous day when he realised all his farm equipment had been destroyed overnight.

"You cannot imagine how I feel, going to the farm to harvest and see that sight," Jerry, 34, told VICE World News.

Five years down the line, nothing has changed. The destruction keeps spinning and blood continues to flow.

Speaking to VICE World News on Tuesday immediately upon returning from his farm where he had gone for inspection, he said he saw three dead bodies of farmers close to his land.

“Today, just today, I saw three bodies lying close to the road and they were killed by the herders,” he said, angrily. “There is fear going to the farm every day. Even today, when I saw the bodies, I thought to myself, nobody knows who is next.

“Witnessing those things is like hell. Those people who were killed today woke up and thought they were just going to their farm. When you see scenes like that, your morale is always down. Eventually, one day I will stop.”

To make things even worse, the entire farm is now underwater and his harvest is gone. He will lose 21,600,000 naira (£43,753) to the floods.

Jerry could not conceal his anger and disappointment, especially at the government, which is doing little to tackle insecurity and help farmers out.

“Going forward is just picking up the pieces... [the government] is not coming to anybody’s aid,” he said.

Nigeria’s food security is already precarious partly because of the widespread violence. Last month, inflation hit a record 17-year high, rising to 20.5 percent with food inflation surging to 18.4 percent, according to the Central Bank of Nigeria’s April Economic Report.

Experts say there has been heavier rainfall as a result of climate change. However, heavy rainfalls have aggravated the lack of government action.

On the 13th of September, the Cameroonian authorities released excess water from the Ladgo Dam which flowed into Nigeria through the River Benue, a major river. The overflow of water and heavy rain combined to cause the catastrophic flooding.

Cameroon and Nigeria both agreed to build a dam on either end of the River Benue decades ago to contain the overflow of water, but only Cameroon held up its end of the bargain. The River Benue rises in northern Cameroon and flows into Nigeria through Adamawa in the north-eastern part of Nigeria.

In 2012, after a similar flood killed 363 people and displaced over 2.1 million others, the countries agreed to a memorandum of understanding stating that Cameroon has to inform Nigeria before the release of the dam every year.

Manzo Ezekiel, a spokesperson for the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), confirmed to VICE World News that Nigeria was informed the dam would be released, but he said the Cameroonian dam wasn’t the only factor contributing to the floods, and that Nigeria’s rivers are full and local dams are also releasing water.

“As soon as we received the warning, we escalated it to everyone that needed to know about it including the state governments in order to prepare relocation plans for the communities,” he said.

But experts say the flooding could have been avoided if Nigeria had kept its promise.

“Our non-commitment to building the dam symbolises our level of preparation for climate change. It also highlights that we have been weak in our engineering response to floods,” Taiwo Ogunwumi, a flood risk researcher and founder of Geohazard Risk Mapping Initiative, told VICE World News.

	<p>Despite the scale of devastation, President Muhammadu Buhari has yet to address the nation, but in a tweet posted on Sunday, he said “all federal agencies dealing with rescue and disaster management have been directed to scale up response and intervention efforts.”</p> <p>Peter Obi, the third-party election candidate with huge youth appeal, has suspending campaigning for the 2023 vote to visit flood victims in Benue.</p> <p>The flooding is expected to continue to wreak havoc for at least another month, with more heavy rainfall on the way.</p> <p>NEMA doesn’t know when the floods will subside.</p> <p>“All the scenario analyses are indicating that the warming will continue and intensity of events like this will continue to amplify,” professor Emmanuel Oladipo, a professional fellow at the Centre for Climate Change and Development. told VICE World News. “We are expecting worse situations towards 2050. We need to plan.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Pentagon to pay travel, leave for abortions
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/oct/20/pentagon-pay-travel-costs-offer-leave-service-memb/
GIST	<p>The Pentagon will cover some travel and transportation costs for service members who must cross state lines for legal abortions, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Thursday in a memo that lays out the broad strokes of military policy on the hot-button issue in a post-Roe world.</p> <p>Saying limits on access to reproductive health care “will interfere with our ability to recruit, retain and maintain the readiness” of the U.S. military, the defense secretary’s long-awaited memo set out to answer lingering questions about how the Pentagon will approach abortions after the Supreme Court’s June decision reversing the landmark Roe v. Wade ruling, which established a national right to abortion.</p> <p>The guidelines were announced less than a month before the midterm elections and could be seen as a Biden administration effort to lock in abortion protections for military personnel ahead of a potential Republican takeover of Congress. Pentagon officials denied that politics played any role in the timing of the memo.</p> <p>“There is no timeline. We can’t work fast enough when it comes to taking care of our people,” Air Force Brig Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters.</p> <p>The three-page document lays out a multipronged approach covering women in the armed services seeking abortions and the health care professionals providing them. In the memo, Mr. Austin said the Pentagon will establish privacy rules for pregnant women, including an extension to 20 weeks of the time a service member has before notifying a commander of her pregnancy.</p> <p>The directive also puts into place new protections for Defense Department health care providers who perform abortions for service members in limited circumstances — such as pregnancies resulting from rape or those in which the mother’s life is threatened — in states where most abortions are outlawed.</p> <p>Many major military installations are in the South and West — including Texas, Georgia and South Carolina — where state legislatures have moved quickly to pass or reinstate sharp curbs on abortion and abortion providers.</p> <p>The Pentagon will reimburse some expenses for military doctors who want to obtain licenses in other states to provide reproductive services to military personnel, Mr. Austin said.</p> <p>A September study by the Rand Corp. think tank said the Pentagon faced “wide-ranging” challenges in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling. It estimated that 40% of active-duty servicewomen and 43% of</p>

Defense Department civilian women will be stationed in places with little or no access to local abortion services.

The study said the abortion restrictions could have an impact on combat readiness, recruitment levels and retention rates for women. Based on military health records and surveys, the think tank estimates that 5,000 to 7,000 Defense Department military and civilian employees seek abortion services annually.

Direct support

Perhaps the most notable new policies involve direct support, in the form of money and time off, for women who must leave their bases and travel across state lines to get abortions. Under the directive, Mr. Austin ordered Defense Department officials to create uniform policies to allow for “appropriate administrative absence” for those women — meaning the absences won’t count against personal leave.

The Defense Department also should cover some of the travel costs associated with the trips, the secretary said.

“Our service members and their families are often required to travel or move to meet our staffing, operational and training requirements.

“Such moves should not limit their access to reproductive health care,” Mr. Austin wrote in the memo. “The practical effects of recent changes are that significant numbers of service members and their families may be forced to travel greater distances, take more time off from work, and pay more out-of-pocket expenses to receive reproductive health care,” he wrote. “In my judgment, such effects qualify as unusual, extraordinary, hardship or emergency circumstances for service members and their dependents and will interfere with our ability to recruit, retain and maintain the readiness of a highly qualified force.”

To address those issues, Mr. Austin directed that the Pentagon: “Establish travel and transportation allowances for service members and their dependents, as appropriate and consistent with applicable federal law and operational requirements, and as necessary amend any applicable travel regulations, to facilitate official travel to access non-covered reproductive health care that is unavailable within the local area of a service member’s permanent duty station.”

The details of the policy are still being hammered out, defense officials told reporters on a conference call Thursday. It’s not clear how much the program could cost or whether it has any hard monetary caps on the expenses.

Mr. Austin’s memo stresses that women’s privacy and personal choices about reproductive health are of utmost importance.

Questions remain about how exactly a pregnant woman could obtain excused absences and financial reimbursement for travel without multiple superior officers or military administrative personnel knowing about it. Defense officials said the details of the policy will seek a balance between ensuring “commanders get the information they need to make the right decision” while protecting an individual service member’s privacy.

The memo was the latest in a series of steps the Pentagon has taken since June to protect abortion access for military service members.

Shortly after the Supreme Court’s decision, the Pentagon announced in a memo that military doctors will continue to perform abortions in cases in which the mother’s life is in danger or if the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. Military doctors performed 91 such abortions from 2016 to 2021, officials said.

Military leaders also may consider a service member’s personal views on abortion when deciding where to station them. Last month, Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville told the news outlet Defense One

	<p>that the Army will consider requests from soldiers who want to serve in states that allow abortions, though he stressed there is no guarantee those requests will be granted.</p> <p>“We do have options where a soldier can say, ‘Hey, I want to serve in Alaska,’ and if we can meet those preferences, we will actually do that,” Gen. McConville said. “It’s a contract ... and if we can make it work, we’ll try to make it work for them.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 School digital maps to aid police responses
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/oct/20/22-states-invest-digital-maps-help-police-respond/
GIST	<p>At least 22 states have invested in digitizing maps of K-12 public schools for law enforcement agencies to use during emergencies such as mass shootings.</p> <p>Iowa, New Jersey, Virginia and Wisconsin have launched multimillion-dollar initiatives to digitize school blueprints for local police agencies over the past six months. Eighteen other states are digitizing school maps as they tweak safety protocols for mass shootings, according to Critical Response Group Inc., the nation’s largest school-mapping contractor.</p> <p>“Most school buildings are 50 years old and have blueprints or schematics that aren’t accurate or available to law enforcement,” said company CEO Mike Rodgers. “When you digitize a map, you can share it more easily with first responders.”</p> <p>Mr. Rodgers said Critical Response Group has mapped 5,000 K-12 campuses.</p> <p>According to law enforcement officials, digitizing maps will reduce emergency response times in situations like the May 24 mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. Law enforcement agencies have been sharply criticized for not entering the building and engaging the shooter, who killed 19 children and two teachers during a 74-minute spree as officers waited outside.</p> <p>“Schools can be complex facilities with varying designs and large meandering footprints,” said Jonathan F. Thompson, executive director of the National Sheriffs’ Association. “Having access to layouts and designs with an accurate map is important for response to safety needs.”</p> <p>In April, Virginia launched the country’s first statewide digital mapping initiative for public schools. Since then, more than 1,000 schools and 85 districts have participated.</p> <p>The commonwealth has allocated \$3,500 per public school and \$3.3 million overall for the program, according to a September statement from Gov. Glenn Youngkin.</p> <p>“Our children’s safety is the utmost priority and I’m pleased that my administration is taking key steps to enhance school safety,” said Mr. Youngkin, a Republican.</p> <p>Public schools that opt into Virginia’s K-12 Digital Mapping Program must share digitized maps with local and state first responders to have on file in the event of an emergency. The maps include high-resolution images and a gridded overlay map.</p> <p>Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, a Republican, announced in June that she would direct \$6 million of COVID-19 relief funds to a digital mapping project.</p> <p>Wisconsin officials announced a \$2 million grant program in July. It will run for two years and grant up to \$5,000 per school as an incentive to switch from blueprints to digital maps.</p> <p>In August, New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat, announced a \$6.5 million grant program. As part of the plan, the New Jersey State Police will map 1,320 public and charter schools by the start of next school year.</p>

“To have those digitized images on a device could really help school resource officers,” said Mo Canady, the executive director of the National Association of School Resource Officers. “I’d like to see them be able to send those maps directly to responding police units.”

Many states have required public schools to share blueprints with law enforcement since the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado. But not all schools have kept up-to-date maps on file with first responders.

Before Mr. Youngkin’s initiative, the National Center for School Safety found in a 2019 survey that 1 in 3 Virginia schools had not shared an electronic floor plan with police.

The new statewide programs will generate critical incident maps, a technique modeled on maps that U.S. special operations forces have used in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Critical incident maps usually include up-to-date information about entrances, stairwells, electronic door locks, utility lines, first aid kits and utility lines — allowing first responders to see the inside of any classroom where a 911 call originates.

According to figures released by the state programs, each digital map costs between \$3,5000 and \$5,000 to create with software and 3D scanners.

Some health officials have cautioned against thinking the maps will reduce gun violence in public schools.

“While providing digital maps to local officials might be helpful in efforts to increase school safety, I have to admit it seems a bit like rearranging the furniture on the Titanic,” said Thomas Plante, a clinical psychologist who teaches at Santa Clara University. “School shootings are clearly a public health crisis where Americans suffer more than any other developed country on earth.”

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HEADLINE	10/20 Military bases in Hawaii without water
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/oct/20/us-military-bases-hawaii-without-water-after-water/
GIST	<p>HONOLULU — Several U.S. military bases here, including the headquarters of the Indo-Pacific Command, are without water after a water main break disrupted service to more than 90,000 service members and family, according to military officials. The water main broke Friday and repairs to the 36-inch pipe are expected to last a week.</p> <p>Navy Capt. Mark Sohaney, commander of Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickham, asked for “patience and understanding” from military personnel in dealing with the water outage.</p> <p>“The entire installation and our partners continue to put forth every effort to return full potable water service,” Capt. Sohaney said in a letter earlier this week posted on the base’s Facebook page. “Fixing a line of this size presents an engineering challenge and there hasn’t been any easy fixes.”</p> <p>The military has issued a boil-water advisory and is distributing water at Navy, Army and Air Force exchanges.</p> <p>Portable toilets have been deployed at Camp Smith, the Indo-Pacific Command headquarters.</p> <p>“All commands were also asked to minimize manning and to only perform mission-essential activities,” the letter said. “These measures will reduce the stress on the remaining capacity of the potable water system.”</p> <p>Camp Smith is home to the headquarters for one of the military’s largest combatant commands, integrating Navy, Army, Air Force and Marine Corps forces throughout the Pacific and Indian Ocean.</p>

	<p>A spokesman for the Indo-Pacific Command said its personnel and families were supplied with bottled drinking water and are teleworking during repairs to the water main.</p> <p>“Otherwise there has been no impact to operations,” the spokesman said.</p> <p>Water can continue to be used for personal hygiene, but water used in cooking, brushing teeth or drinking must be boiled for at least one minute, the letter stated.</p> <p>According to news reports, the water main burst last Friday and was followed by two smaller breaks in the Pearl City Peninsula area of Honolulu. A fourth break was discovered on Monday.</p> <p>In addition to Camp Smith, other bases affected include Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, Hickam, Aliamanu Military Reservation, and Red Hill.</p> <p>The water main break follows the leak of nearly 20,000 gallons of jet fuel from the Red Hill bulk fuel storage facility that showed up in the local drinking water system. The leak forced a large-scale evacuation of residents.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/21 Day 240 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/21/russia-ukraine-war-latest-what-we-know-on-day-240-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six people have been injured Friday morning in a Russian strike at “an object of industrial infrastructure” in the city of Kharkiv, according to a Telegram post by the regional governor, Oleh Synyehubov. A series of explosions have also been reported in Ukraine’s south-eastern city of Zaporizhzhia, and no casualties were reported after strikes on the coast of the Kutsurub community in Mykolaiv region. • Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has accused Russia of planning to destroy a hydroelectric dam in the eastern Kherson region, where Ukrainian soldiers have been steadily advancing and Moscow-installed authorities have begun what they call ‘evacuations’ of civilians. Late on Thursday Zelenskiy accused Moscow of planting mines at a the dam in the Russian-occupied region, posing a threat to a 400km Soviet-built long canal network. • Moscow-installed authorities in Ukraine’s occupied southern Kherson region said on Friday that Ukrainian armed forces killed four people when they shelled the Antonivskiy Bridge over the Dnipro River. • The UK Ministry of Defence has claimed Russia orchestrated a distraction campaign by announcing that 70,000 Belarusian troops would be involved in a new Russian-Belarusian group of forces. It is unlikely that Russia has actually deployed a significant number of extra troops into Belarus and the announcement is likely an attempt to convince Ukraine to divert forces to guard the northern border, according to British intelligence. • A Russian court has ordered the arrest of television journalist Marina Ovsyannikova, local media reports. Ovsyannikova was under house arrest and has already fled Russia, her lawyer said this week. • Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, president of Turkey, has said he will meet Sweden’s new prime minister Ulf Kristersson over Sweden’s bid to join Nato, which Turkey has opposed. Erdoğan also said he sees no obstacles to extending the UN-brokered deal allowing Ukrainian Black Sea grain exports. • The European Union must remain united in its support for Ukraine and should start working on holding Russia legally accountable for its activities in the war, the Latvian prime minister, Krišjānis Kariņš, said on his way to the second day of an EU summit. His Estonian counterpart, Kaja Kallas, echoed his words, saying “We definitely have to discuss the legal response to the crimes of aggression that have been committed in Ukraine. That can only be addressed by a separate tribunal.”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iran deepened its involvement in Russia's invasion of Ukraine by providing technical support for Russian pilots flying Iranian-made drones to bomb civilian targets, the White House confirmed. The US national security council's John Kirby said on Thursday that it was the US's understanding that the Iranian advisers were in Crimea to provide training and maintenance – but not to actually pilot the drones – after Russian forces experienced difficulties in operating the unmanned flying bombs. • Iran's foreign ministry advised its citizens on Friday to refrain from traveling to Ukraine and asked Iranians there to leave the country. • Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba has spoken to Israeli prime minister Yair Lapid and discussed in detail Kyiv's request for air and missile defence systems and technology. • The UK is implementing new sanctions on three Iranian individuals and a business responsible for supplying Russia with drones used to bombard Ukraine. By supplying these drones Iran is “actively warmongering, profiting off Russia's abhorrent attacks on Ukrainian citizens, and adding to the suffering of the people and the destruction of critical infrastructure”, a foreign office statement said. The assets of all four have been frozen and the individuals are also subject to travel bans. • Prior to the UK's announcement, the EU agreed sanctions against the same business and three individuals. Tehran denies supplying the drones to Moscow, while the Kremlin said the west is seeking to put “pressure” on Iran with accusations that Moscow is using drones made in the country. • Ukraine began restricting electricity supplies across the country starting from 7am on Thursday in response to Russia's strikes against its energy infrastructure. A barrage of more than 300 attacks have destroyed a third of all power plants across the country, President Zelenskiy said. Ukrainians will now need to prepare for “rolling blackouts” and people will have to conserve energy, the deputy head of the president's office, Kyrylo Tymoshenko, warned. • A Russian air strike that hit a major thermal power station in the city of Burshtyn in western Ukraine on Wednesday has caused “quite serious” damage, the region's governor said on Thursday. • A Russian aircraft released a missile near a British plane patrolling in international airspace over the Black Sea on 29 September, the UK defence secretary, Ben Wallace, revealed. He told the House of Commons that the Russians blamed the incident on a “technical malfunction”. • German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Thursday that Putin was using energy and hunger as weapons but has failed to break the west's unity and will not achieve his war aims through scorched earth tactics. “We will not let Moscow's latest escalation go unanswered. Scorched earth tactics will not help Russia win the war. They will only strengthen the unity and resolve of Ukraine and its partners,” Scholz told the German parliament. • Nato allies will act if Sweden or Finland come under pressure from Russia or another adversary before they become full members of the alliance, Nato's secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, said on Thursday.
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HEADLINE	10/21 Ukraine forces press momentum
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/21/we-have-a-window-ukraines-forces-press-their-momentum-on-khersons-frontline
GIST	<p>With a deafening roar the rockets erupted from the launcher on the back of the Mitsubishi. The pickup truck was parked by a field of blackened dead sunflowers on territory that had been seized back from Russian forces in the Kherson region in south Ukraine just two weeks ago.</p> <p>Barely 30 seconds later, the two 122mm missiles, arcing through the heavy grey sky, devastated a makeshift Russian headquarters that had been a base for about 100 soldiers in an abandoned school in the village of Dudchany, five miles south-west.</p>

Ukraine's forces now have every intention of taking Dudchany back within the next few weeks as they attempt to push west towards the city of Kherson, the eponymous regional capital, and the first city to fall to Russia after Vladimir Putin's February invasion.

This is the frontline in the great advance by Ukrainian forces on the Kherson oblast. In recent days, Sergey Surovikin, the newly appointed commander of Putin's forces, who made his reputation as 'General Armageddon' in Syria, has admitted that there are "difficult decisions to make" in the region. The Russian-appointed civil authorities have ordered an evacuation from the parts of Kherson city that lie north of the Dnieper.

Ukrainian soldiers believe the momentum is with them. "We have a window," says Max, 38.

Max commands a unit of 30 men, soon to be 54, that pilot the reconnaissance and attack drones that provide the Ukrainian artillery on this flank of Volodymyr Zelenskiy's counteroffensive with the locations of Russian troops and hardware.

He fed the artillery hitting the Russian HQ in Dudchany on Wednesday with the coordinates before he and his men raced for cover to avoid return fire.

"You can call us the legendary battalion 248," he said with a laugh. "We always hit the target." The unit also goes by the name of "the Karlssons", after a 1950s Swedish cartoon character able to fly thanks to a propeller in his back that remains popular in this part of the world.

In a dark world, a little childishness goes a long way. "I used to work for my family company making fertilisers," says Max. "You still do in a way," joked Shannon, 39, a New Zealander from Christchurch, who joined the unit in August.

The Karlssons lost one man to a grenade over the summer and two soldiers were hospitalised two weeks ago after their vehicle drove over a mine. As a reconnaissance unit, they are high-value scalps.

Shannon, a former soldier in his own country, and Aaron, 25, an ex US Marine from New England who joined at the same time this summer, had a close reconnaissance mission to accomplish later that day. They had to creep within 1km (0.6 miles) of their Russian target. "We have had some close calls," said Aaron. "I found some shrapnel in my pocket after one. Kept that for good luck."

Kherson's value as a big strategic and symbolic target for Ukraine was perhaps only strengthened by Putin's announcement of its "annexation" along with Donetsk, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia. The proclamation was met by world condemnation and mockery given the ongoing fighting.

The top third of the Kherson oblast in southern Ukraine is cut from the rest of the province by the Dnieper river. Russia has held both the two-thirds below the river and, until recently, much of the rest of the territory north of it since shortly after the war began.

But the Ukrainian counteroffensive launched in August has eaten heavily into that top section, leading western officials to suggest that Kherson city itself, or at least the northern part, could be taken within weeks.

"Now we have an opportunity to take the right bank [the north of the Dnieper river]," Max said. But the fighting is tough. Communications intercepts reveal that Russian morale is breaking in some parts of the line in Kherson. But not on this flank of the oblast where Max and his men are operating. "They are a very good squad. In many places they are ready to surrender but over here they are ready to fight until the end," he said.

A further threat to the Ukrainian advance is the fear that the Russians will blow up the Kakhovka hydroelectric power station further down the Dnieper river from Dudchany. That could turn passable land

into a swamp. “It is possible as it doesn’t matter to them. They don’t care. If they are losing the areas they don’t mind making the situation for Ukrainians worse.”

There is also a shortage of drones. Much of the Ukrainians’ hardware is funded from outside the state [through crowdfunding](#). They have had up to 20 shot down or made ineffective due to Russian cyber technology. A small four-rotor drone, used earlier on Wednesday from the garden of an abandoned home in a recently liberated village to inspect Russian troop and artillery positions on the other side of the Dnieper, is Chinese-made. It flies up to a height of 1.5km (one mile) and has a 200x zoom allowing it to see across the flat plains of this part of the country for about 40km (25 miles). “But we don’t have any US or British drones and we would really love to have some,” Max said.

The Karlssons nevertheless keep moving and chalking up the successes. The abandoned Russian trenches, tank helmets, flares for guiding helicopters and rations that lie around the fields in which they operate bears witness to the freshness of those victories and value of their work. The absence of their friends alongside them reminds them of the risks they take.

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HEADLINE	10/20 Russia conscripts bemoan lack of supplies
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/20/the-army-has-nothing-new-russian-conscripts-bemoan-lack-of-supplies
GIST	<p>When her recently mobilised brother Vladimir rang from the frontline last week, Olesya Shishkanova recorded the phone call – and with it, a litany of complaints.</p> <p>“They gave us absolutely no equipment. The army has nothing, we had to buy all our gear ourselves,” complained Vladimir, 23, who was conscripted as part of Vladimir Putin’s mobilisation earlier this month.</p> <p>“I even had to paint my gun to cover the rust. It is a nightmare ... Soon they’ll make us buy our own grenades,” he added in the call that Shishkanova recorded and uploaded on her page on the Russian social media site VK.</p> <p>Vladimir’s story is far from unique. Across the country, newly mobilised men are buying up everything from thermal underwear to body armour as more evidence emerges that Russia’s undersupplied army has not been able to provide them with even the basics when they arrive at the front.</p> <p>On Telegram, dozens of discussion channels have sprung up in which the wives and sisters of mobilised men share advice on where to best buy body armour and clothing for their relatives before they depart to fight in Putin’s war in Ukraine.</p> <p>“From morning to evening, I scan the internet to find good deals for our boys,” said Anastasia, a member of the Help for Soldiers group, which is based in Russia’s Sverdlovsk region near the Ural mountains.</p> <p>Anastasia said that the local recruitment office in Sverdlovsk “strongly advised” the newly mobilised soldiers to bring their own gear, despite statements from the defence ministry that all mobilised soldiers will be dressed and equipped.</p> <p>For some Russians, the shortages in basic equipment feed the growing realisation that their military, lauded before the invasion as a world-class fighting force, has turned out to be painfully underprepared for the war.</p> <p>“It is bad enough that our men are being taken from us,” said Anastasia, a teacher from Bryansk, a Russian city less than 100 miles from the border with Ukraine.</p> <p>“We had to spend our monthly salary on my husband’s gear so that he at least has a chance to come back. Frankly, it is completely embarrassing. It is a mess,” she said.</p>

The run on goods has led to shortages and steep hikes in prices across outdoor clothing stores and online marketplaces selling military gear.

According to a report by the business outlet Kommersant, prices for bulletproof vests have risen by 500%, and they are now selling for as much as 50,000 rubles (£710). Similar increases in price have been seen for helmets and basic camping equipment.

“Our stock is empty. Sleeping bags sold out two days after the mobilisation was announced,” said Aleksei, the owner of a hiking and outdoors shop in Ekaterinburg, Russia’s fourth biggest city.

“We only have a few winter boots lying around and two tents. This has never happened to us before.”

What little gear that the army does issue to newly mobilised soldiers appear to be outdated or outright inadequate.

In one video circulating on social media, a mobilised Russian soldier complains that he was given body armour made for Airsoft games with no actual bullet resistance. Similarly, Vladimir told his sister on his call from the frontline that his unit had been given Airsoft gun scopes.

Even prior to Putin’s mobilisation push, the military shortcomings of the Russian army – on paper the second biggest in the world, with a budget of around £58bn a year – were painfully exposed as Moscow failed to achieve its goal of quickly taking over Kyiv.

After Russia’s 2008 military campaign in Georgia, the country’s defence ministry, under the Putin ally Sergei Shoigu, sought to revamp the army, aiming to transform it into a sophisticated, modern force while vouching to root out corruption.

But since Russian tanks entered Ukraine on 24 February, its military equipment has systematically faltered to a degree that has surprised most western analysts.

In an intelligence briefing on Sunday, the UK Ministry of Defence said that “endemic corruption and poor logistics” remained a cause of Russia’s “poor performance” in Ukraine. The ministry said the average amount of personal equipment Russia was providing to its mobilised reservists was “almost certainly lower than the already poor provision of previously deployed troops”.

“I am not at all surprised to see the mess that the army is in,” said Gleb Irisov, a former air force lieutenant who left the Russian military in 2020 and is now living in the US.

“The army has always been deeply corrupt, and those issues were never properly addressed. They didn’t spend any money on the personnel while our seniors were becoming rich,” he added.

The opposition leader Alexei Navalny and his investigation team have published a number of exposés linking senior defence officials to expensive properties and hidden bank accounts, including a 2015 investigation into a £16m mansion purportedly owned by Shoigu. Other data indicates that embezzlement is taking place across all ranks of the army.

A recent investigation by BBC News Russian showed that, over the last eight years, military courts have issued more than 550 sentences for theft of clothing from army stocks. In total, during the same period, court data revealed that more than 12,000 corruption cases were opened involving the theft of military gear and equipment, with some cases occurring even after Russia invaded Ukraine.

The scale of Putin’s mass mobilisation has now exacerbated some of the already existing issues, said Pavel Luzin, an independent Russian military expert.

“Russia was just not prepared for mobilisation of this scale. It was doomed to have logistical issues.”

	<p>Luzin explained that, over the last two decades, the Kremlin has sought to overhaul its military, moving away from a conscription-based army to one that depends on professional forces.</p> <p>“When mobilisation was announced, there was no mechanism in place to actually implement it,” Luzin said.</p> <p>The glaring equipment and logistics problems have now become a problem too significant for the authorities to ignore.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Valentina Matviyenko, a senior politician and member of Putin’s security council, ordered the country’s anti-monopoly agencies to regulate market prices for military equipment.</p> <p>“The prices for essential items for the mobilised recruits have skyrocketed. It is not clear why, on what basis,” Matviyenko said.</p> <p>Hours after Matviyenko’s statement, Russia’s prime minister, Mikhail Mishustin, called on businesses to “quickly increase the output of equipment and technology” needed for what Moscow calls its “special military operation”.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/21 Russia extra payments to mobilized troops
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-is-offering-extra-payments-to-mobilized-troops-11666320420?mod=hp_lead_pos6
GIST	<p>MOSCOW—Russian President Vladimir Putin, who this week gave local authorities new powers to maintain order, is also seeking to appease the public with compensation packages of money and goods for the men swept up in his unpopular mobilization campaign.</p> <p>The subsidies—which range from payments that can well exceed average monthly salaries to distributions of animals and food—are billed as support for the families of the more than 200,000 men called away since last month to serve in the military.</p> <p>Government critics have spoken out on social media, calling the programs a payoff to kill or be killed in the war in Ukraine. The unevenness of the subsidies programs, which are distributed by regional authorities, has also amplified social disparities in the country, the critics said. Some poorer regions are having difficulty finding extra money to compensate mobilized men and the federal government has stepped in.</p> <p>Many families say their concerns lie less with cash or food than with the safety of their loved ones.</p> <p>“If the state gives money, no one would refuse it. But what’s important is the life and health of my only son,” said Margarita Sokolova, a 53-year-old cafeteria worker in St. Petersburg whose son was called up in September and received 100,000 rubles, or about \$1,623. “Is 100,000 worth a person’s life?”</p> <p>The compensation is aimed at shoring up public support for the Kremlin’s faltering war in Ukraine, say analysts who monitor Russian domestic policy. It isn’t the first time authorities have doled out money. Earlier in the conflict, Moscow gave subsidies to families, pregnant women and retirees, among others, to soften the impact of international sanctions.</p> <p>An appeased population would help Mr. Putin buy time to determine the further course of the war while not having to contend with domestic discontent, the analysts said. He also on Wednesday implemented new security measures across Russia, including more authority for local officials to maintain public order and boost industrial production to support the war.</p>

The Sept. 21 decision to mobilize new recruits [spurred widespread protests](#) and drove hundreds of thousands of fighting-age men to flee the country. Public polls and social media show that Russians are increasingly anxious about the war.

Last week, Mr. Putin said that the mobilization would be completed later this month, with some 222,000 Russians already drafted and 16,000 of them deployed to fight in Ukraine. On Monday, Moscow's mayor said military mobilization in the Russian capital had been fulfilled and men who had previously been drafted but had not yet reported for duty no longer had to comply.

Government opponents warn that there is nothing to stop the Kremlin from declaring another mobilization, and they call the subsidies blood money.

"Right now, hundreds of thousands of mobilized people are going to kill and die literally for their money," staff of the now-banned anticorruption foundation of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny wrote on Telegram earlier this month.

Whether they get subsidies or not, mobilized men don't have the choice of whether to serve. The terms of mobilization state no deadline for the troops' return from the war, which some military analysts forecast could grind on for several more months, if not years.

In Moscow, the mobilized are being offered 50,000 rubles a month, the equivalent of around \$811 in compensation, in addition to the mandated federal minimum monthly salary of 195,000 rubles, or about \$3,166—depending on their rank—that the government has said it would pay men newly drafted who fight in Ukraine.

The Siberian Krasnoyarsk and Novosibirsk regions are each offering a 100,000-ruble lump sum to those mobilized, while in the region of Moscow, and Kemerovo in southwestern Siberia, they receive a one-time payment of 200,000 rubles, or about \$3,247.

The sums are large for Russia, where the average monthly salary is around \$1,007.

Payments in case of injury while fighting in Ukraine ranges from 100,000-to 300,000 rubles, depending on the severity of the wounds, and one million rubles in the event of the death of a serviceman, the government has said.

The subsidies are sent to mobilized men's bank cards linked to Russia's homegrown Mir card payment system. The recipient can set up forwarding of the payment to a relative or leave the bank card with a family member to use.

Complaints abound on social media about payments being delayed or not coming at all, bank bureaucracy that hinders relatives from accessing payments, and lack of time to get documents to allow relatives to assume financial responsibilities.

Mr. Putin this week acknowledged problems with the payments and said he had instructed regions to follow through on allowances.

"We cannot provide [payment] in the form that rich regions can afford," he said.

On Sakhalin, a Russian island in the Pacific Ocean north of Japan, families of those mobilized will get about 5 to 6 kilograms of fish, in addition to a lump sum of 300,000 rubles for those sent to fight in Ukraine, the government said.

Ms. Sokolova in St. Petersburg said no amount can compensate for her son's life.

The 33-year-old divorced father of a toddler son received his call-up notice the day after the mobilization was announced, she said. Four days later he set off for training, said Ms. Sokolova. The

	<p>young man, who received one year of mandatory conscript training 10 years ago, left his bank card with his mother, who confirmed that 100,000 rubles had been wired to it.</p> <p>She said she recently went to three churches and lit candles for the sake of her son's health.</p> <p>"His father, grandmother and me, we only have him," said Ms. Sokolova, who started to sob. "His father wakes up at 3 a.m. and weeps. We cry every day."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/21 SoCal container ship backup ends
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/southern-californias-notorious-container-ship-backup-ends-11666344603?mod=hp_lista_pos2
GIST	<p>The backup of container ships off Southern California's coast that was at the heart of U.S. supply chain congestion during the Covid-19 pandemic has effectively disappeared.</p> <p>The queue of ships waiting to unload at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach fell from a peak of 109 ships in January to four vessels this week, according to the Marine Exchange of Southern California. Shipping specialists say fewer ships than normal are heading to the main U.S. gateway complex for imports from Asia in coming days and that cargo volumes that had long swamped the ports now are receding.</p> <p>Bottlenecks continue to delay cargo at other major U.S. seaports and at inland freight hubs, but the end of the backup at the big ports in California signals broader supply-chain tangles that have been troubling retailers and manufacturers are unwinding.</p> <p>"Clearly it is good given how much these supply-chain constraints were drivers of inflation last year," said Sameera Fazili, a deputy director of the National Economic Council who leads the White House Task Force on supply-chain disruptions.</p> <p>Port and Biden administration officials point to a range of factors that have helped ease congestion, including a tighter queuing system that had ships lining up further out in the Pacific, new container yards that freed up space on docks, and government initiatives that fostered better collaboration between retailers, ports, railroads and truckers.</p> <p>But the biggest gain likely has come from fewer boxes reaching the busiest U.S. seaport complex for container imports. U.S. import volumes are declining, according to trade data analysts, and a growing share of the shipments are heading to ports on the East and Gulf coasts as importers ship away from the Southern California backup.</p> <p>The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach together handled 686,133 loaded import containers in September, down 18% from a year earlier and the lowest level since June 2020, according to port figures. August imports fell 12% from last year, a steep drop during the traditional peak shipping season.</p> <p>Ports including Savannah, Ga., Houston and New York and New Jersey have coped with backups triggered by the diverted cargo. But in recent months, big-box retailers have canceled many orders after a rush of orders earlier in the year and shifting consumer buying patterns left the merchants overstocked.</p> <p>Descartes Datamyne, a data analysis group owned by supply-chain software company Descartes Systems Group Inc., says container imports to the U.S. in September declined by 11% from a year earlier and by 12.4% from August.</p> <p>With demand slowing, shipping lines have canceled between 26% to 31% of their sailings across the Pacific over the coming weeks, according to Sea-Intelligence, a Denmark-based shipping data group, signaling that carriers are preparing for a continued drop in bookings.</p>

	<p>The Southern California backup began on Oct. 15, 2020, when the Marine Exchange reported five ships were queuing to unload at the Los Angeles-Long Beach complex, an unusual number compared with the one or two ships that sometimes have to wait. The queue swelled to dozens of ships, and shipping containers spilled out from the overfilled ports as Americans stuck at home under Covid-19 restrictions ordered massive volumes of household goods, office equipment and electronics that spurred a 20% surge in imports in 2021.</p> <p>Port of Los Angeles Executive Director Gene Seroka said that at one point he surveyed the scene by helicopter from the port complex to Ontario, Calif., nearly 60 miles from the coast. “You could see containers piled up everywhere. It was amazing,” he said.</p> <p>Backups also hit other U.S. ports, and seaports in Europe and Asia, as delays cascaded across shipping and tied up vessels as companies sought space to move their goods. By January 2022, only 31% of container ships arrived at ports on time, down from about 70% before the pandemic, according to Sea-Intelligence.</p> <p>The backups delayed deliveries of furniture, appliances and household goods to consumers and drove up ocean shipping rates to record prices, which helped push inflation in the U.S. toward a four-decade high.</p> <p>By September 2021, the average cost for shipping a container from Asia to the U.S. West Coast exceeded \$20,000, a sixfold increase from a year earlier, according to the Freightos Baltic Index. Last week, the average cost to ship a container from Asia to the U.S. West Coast had declined 84% from a year earlier to \$2,720.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 China military catching up US; battle ready?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-military-us-taiwan-xi-11666268994?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2
GIST	<p>China’s military is emerging as a true competitor to the U.S. under Xi Jinping.</p> <p>The People’s Liberation Army now has hypersonic missiles that evade most defenses, a technology the U.S. is still developing. Its attack drones can swarm to paralyze communications networks. China’s naval ships outnumber America’s, and it launched its third aircraft carrier this summer, the first to be designed and built in the country. Its defense budget is second only to the U.S.’s. China’s military has more serving members, at around 2 million, compared with just under 1.4 million in the U.S.</p> <p>The question for Mr. Xi, which he has raised in public, is whether those forces are ready for battle.</p> <p>China hasn’t fought a war since a brief border clash with Vietnam in 1979. Unlike American forces, who have fought for most of the past two decades in Iraq and Afghanistan, China’s service members have virtually no combat experience—which some Chinese leaders have referred to as a “peace disease.” Finding a solution short of actual war has been a priority for Mr. Xi, especially as he seeks to prepare the country for a potential showdown with the U.S.</p> <p>“We must comprehensively strengthen military training and preparation, and improve the army’s ability to win,” Mr. Xi said on Sunday at the opening of the Communist Party’s twice-a-decade congress.</p> <p>The issue has become more pressing for Beijing as tensions build with Taiwan, which China sees as part of its territory. On Sunday, Mr. Xi reiterated that Beijing wouldn’t renounce the use of force in China’s effort to take control of the island.</p> <p>“The complete unification of the motherland must be realized, and it will be realized,” he said, drawing loud applause.</p> <p>Taiwan reported few sorties by the Chinese air force close to the island before 2020. It says they have reached more than 1,200 so far this year. After Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taipei in</p>

August, [angering Beijing](#), Chinese military aircraft began crossing the median line between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland on an almost daily basis.

Beijing's state media reported an increase in more qualified recruits to the PLA after Mrs. Pelosi's visit.

Yet PLA publications say some officers make flawed operational decisions, struggle to lead their troops and sometimes don't understand their own orders. Rank-and-file troops are caught in a top-down system of command, potentially leaving them ill-equipped to improvise in battlefield situations—a situation [that has hobbled Russia's military](#) in its invasion of Ukraine.

China's political priorities mean that around 40% of new recruits' training has involved studying about the Communist Party rather than learning how to be a service member. Leaders, some of whom see young Chinese as pampered products of the country's one-child policy, question whether they are tough enough to fight.

An effort to make China's different military branches work more closely together—so-called “jointness,” which is considered crucial to modern warfare—remains untested.

“At present, there are not many commanders in the PLA who are truly proficient in joint combat,” one serving officer at the Zhengzhou Joint Logistics Support Center wrote earlier this year in a commentary in the PLA Daily, the military's newspaper. “If this situation does not change, once there is a war, it will be very dangerous.”

Outside analysts say the PLA appears to be making progress in bringing forces together for more complex joint exercises, helped by interaction with other militaries, [especially Russia's](#). Since Mr. Xi took power, China has increased drills with Russia to as many as 10 a year from one or two previously.

“We are observing an increasing complexity and sophistication in how they are performing in exercises,” said Oriana Skylar Mastro, who researches the Chinese military at Stanford University.

Mr. Xi's ambition, according to China's most recent defense white paper, is to complete a modernization of the military by 2035 and turn it into a “world-class force” by 2049, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Strategists outside China say the PLA's short-range missile, air and naval power is now so well developed that it would be nearly impossible for other countries' militaries to operate near China's shoreline in a conflict.

Beijing's cyberwar capabilities are widely considered to be state-of-the-art. The U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, which advises the president on national security, said in a report this year that China is almost certainly capable of launching cyberattacks that would disrupt critical infrastructure in the U.S., including oil and gas pipelines and rail systems.

Hundreds of millions of dollars spent on ballistic missile technology mean that China can now put [U.S. bases in Asia](#) under threat. A [growing nuclear arsenal](#) is providing Beijing with the means to better deter rivals.

Reports of training missteps or incompetence occasionally surface in state media. Like other militaries, the PLA puts together exercises in which its own forces play the part of rivals. In China, these are known as Blue teams, a color representing NATO. The PLA teams are red, the color of China's flag.

In one 2014 exercise in Inner Mongolia described in state media, the Blue team decided to trick the Red team by sending around 20 troops disguised as members of a friendly local government group, with offerings of cabbages, potatoes and drinks.

It worked. The Red team brought them to their headquarters, where the impostors pulled out weapons and captured the Red commander.

In another case reported in state media, an army battalion commander issued an incorrect order to fire shorter-range artillery when long-range fire was needed. The shots fell short, enabling a Blue armored helicopter to find and destroy the Red position.

A PLA Daily account from last year described how the leaders of a brigade were given night vision equipment ahead of an exercise. They didn't know what it was, and failed to distribute it to their troops.

Such mistakes aren't exclusive to China, but they have fueled insecurity among leaders, who have repeatedly used the phrase "five incapables" to describe PLA failings in speeches and commentaries in China's military press.

The phrase refers to fears that PLA officers cannot judge situations, understand higher authorities' intentions, make operational decisions, deploy troops, or deal with unexpected circumstances.

Another common phrase of self-criticism, the "two inabilities," refers to a perceived inability of the PLA to fight a modern war and the inability of PLA officers to command.

Mr. Xi has been trying to rectify those problems since he came to power in 2012.

In 2015, he launched China's most ambitious military reforms in decades. He overhauled the organizational structure of the PLA with the goal of allowing its armed services—army, navy, air force and rocket and support forces—to work more closely together. Such coordination would likely be needed for major operations such as an invasion of Taiwan.

Mr. Xi also expanded the PLA's budget, created new special operations units and stepped up efforts to draw in more qualified service members.

Beijing extended free healthcare to troops and their families, improved military canteens and encouraged putting popular boy band members in military propaganda to drive recruitment.

Central to the PLA's issues, defense experts say, is a shortage of high-quality talent, including for officers.

In the U.S., competition to get into West Point or one of the other four military academies for officer training is intense. But in China, average scores on standardized admissions tests for those accepted into its military academies over the past few years fell well below those accepted into the most well-regarded universities.

The lowest successful scores at China's prestigious Tsinghua University in 2021 were in many cases nearly 10% higher than at the National University of Defense Technology, often referred to in China as the military Tsinghua.

As a wing of the Communist Party, the PLA is subject to demands from political leaders. In 2021, the Ministry of Education said the role of the military was to provide jobs for young Chinese. Recruitment is skewed heavily toward poorer rural areas, which tend to have lower educational standards and higher unemployment.

Unlike the U.S., the PLA lacks a well-established system for bringing in and retaining talented noncommissioned officers, the backbone of most militaries. NCOs are usually high-school graduates who rise through the enlisted service to help execute orders and manage the lower ranks.

China has tried to make NCO roles more attractive. One program allows recruits to continue studies at a college or vocational school for 2½ years before entering the military, and covers some of the cost, to better qualify them for civilian jobs after military service.

Just over 20,000 students enrolled in the program in 2020, according to official data, a fraction of the overall NCO corps. This year, China said it would add better benefits.

Military analysts say the PLA does have some highly proficient service members, including units similar to U.S. Navy Seals and Air Force commandos.

Mr. Xi has intensified efforts to make military drills more realistic and complex. Before he took power, exercises were sometimes seen by outside analysts as little more than performances to make the military look good. Now they more often provide some of the closest simulations to real-world combat available, military analysts say.

Last year, the PLA's air force and army took part in the first major joint exercises with Russia inside China, involving more than 10,000 personnel. The drills included airborne troop assaults, drone attacks and precision fighter jet strikes, according to official reports.

Dennis Blasko, a retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel who was a military attaché in Beijing in the 1990s, says force-on-force training is usually held by the PLA for relatively short periods such as a day or few days, which wouldn't prepare it for a prolonged war.

The true test of PLA personnel will be when they're called on to fight. Some American military strategists and analysts say China might be a generation away from having the ability and training in its military that could effectively match those of the U.S.

"Our staffs have been doing extended combined operations for decades. Theirs haven't," Mr. Blasko said.

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HEADLINE	10/20 Hospitals record volumes pediatric patients
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-hospitals-experience-record-volumes-of-pediatric-patients#
GIST	<p>Doctors have been warning about this moment for weeks and now it's here. Hospitals across the country are inundated with a rise in respiratory illnesses among their youngest patients.</p> <p>Hospitals in at least 26 states are sounding the alarm and that includes hospitals right here in Western Washington.</p> <p>In a statement to KOMO News, Dr. Tony Woodward, Medical Director, Emergency Medicine; Chief, Division of Emergency Medicine, at Seattle Children's said:</p> <p><i>"The Seattle Children's Emergency Department (ED) continues to see record volumes in pediatric patients in October. We expect that rise to continue, and are optimizing and increasing staffing and ancillary care space. Currently, the month of October has demonstrated volumes that are usually only seen around the mid-winter season, when they are typically at their highest of the year due to viruses.</i></p> <p><i>We have a complex medical population that is especially hard hit by acute viruses, including respiratory illnesses. The ED often serves as a safety net for patients and families who may not be able to find other acute care options in the community when they need it. Seattle Children's prioritizes our ED care based on assessed patient acuity and level of illness. Patients continue to receive immediate care for emergencies."</i></p> <p>Doctors blame the rise on the relaxing of COVID restrictions. With masks on and social distancing in play, children weren't exposed to these illnesses, but now they are. The current situation comes with a potentially tough flu season still ahead.</p>

	<p>"We have not seen a lot of flu in the last two years because of social distancing and masking. It's a little bit difficult to predict what this year is going to be like," said Dr. Susanna Block, Pediatric Hospitalist at Kaiser Permanente Washington.</p> <p>Doctors are reminding families to make sure children are up-to-date with vaccinations.</p> <p>"I anticipate that we'll start seeing influenza in November, December, so if you get your vaccine now you'll be well protected," added Dr. Block.</p> <p>Doctors also advise parents to watch for symptoms like labored breathing and extremely high fever, which could be signs to take your child to the pediatrician.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Paid family leave premiums increase Jan 1st
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/washingtons-paid-family-leave-premiums-to-increase-jan-1#
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — The payroll premiums on workers' wages to pay for Washington state's paid family and medical leave program will increase on Jan. 1.</p> <p>The state's Employment Security Department announced Thursday that the rate will increase from 0.6% to 0.8% of wages to keep pace with the number of people using the program, with most of the share continuing to be paid by employees.</p> <p>The premium increase comes just weeks after an analysis of the financial health of Washington state's paid family leave program estimated the fund would hit an \$8.7 million deficit by the end of the year.</p> <p>The actuarial analysis by the consulting firm Milliman that was recently presented to a legislative task force showed that the current premium rate is not keeping up with demand for the state benefit that launched in 2020 and it recommended increasing the rate.</p> <p>When premiums first were enacted, 0.4% of workers' wages funded the program, with 63% paid by employees and 37% paid by employers. An increase to 0.6% had already gone into effect earlier this year, and employees' share increased to about 73%, with the remainder paid by employers.</p> <p>Under the law, eligible workers receive 12 weeks of paid time off for the birth or adoption of a child or for a serious medical condition of the worker or the worker's family member, or 16 weeks for a combination of both. An additional two weeks may be used if there is a serious health condition with a pregnancy. Family members in the military also qualify for leave to spend time with service members about to be deployed overseas or who return home from deployment.</p> <p>Weekly benefits are calculated based on a percentage of the employee's wages and the state's weekly average wage — which is now \$1,586. Though the weekly amount paid out is currently capped at \$1,327, that is set to increase in January to \$1,427.</p> <p>Concerns about long-term solvency for the program emerged earlier this year, with a warning in January that the program would hit a deficit by March. Lawmakers set aside \$350 million in the state supplemental budget that passed earlier this year to address any deficit that exists on June 30, 2023, the end of the fiscal biennium.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Cleaner air on way: rain, wind, snow
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/weather/cleaner-air-on-the-way-now-rain-wind-mountain-snow-help-boost-air-quality-tomorrow
GIST	SEATTLE - Clean air is on the way now folks!

Finally, a cold front moving into the Northwest tomorrow will give us just what we need to make sure air quality levels get back in the good zone!

A strong moving system is on the way and will hit the coast first early Friday morning. This is the first real Fall weather maker, and we certainly need it!

Lowland rain and mountain snow will finally drop into the region. These conditions, along with breezy winds will clear out the atmosphere of any smoke and haze.

By 8 a.m. Friday, most of Western Washington sees rain.

By 11 a.m., rain becomes widespread with snow falling over the mountains in the higher elevations. This weekend snow levels sit between 4,000' to 3,500'. If you're driving over the Cascades, expect a wintry mix at times, especially over Stevens and White Passes.

By lunchtime Friday, we're clear of most smoke. Eastern WA looks great too!

Most air quality will return to good levels across the state, except for a few areas in Central WA where levels will fluctuate between unhealthy for sensitive groups to moderate.

Highs on Friday dip well below average as this system moves across the region.

Seattle only lands in the low 50s tomorrow. The average for this time of year is 59, dropping to 58 this weekend.

So how much rain do we expect? Well, some of us could see anywhere from just over a quarter of an inch to almost an inch and a half by Saturday evening. And just to put that in perspective, that's more than we saw in the month of October. In fact, from June until now we've seen just near an inch of rain, which put us into the driest summer on record.

A look at the 7-day forecast keeps us showery at times with below-normal highs. Enjoy!

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HEADLINE	10/20 There's something in the water in Virginia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/20/climate/treated-sewage-virginia-aquifer.html
GIST	<p>Virginia doesn't have a megadrought like some parts of the United States, but it has water problems all the same: Homes and businesses in the Hampton Roads region, in the southeastern corner of the state, are drawing groundwater faster than it can be replenished. The situation has gotten so bad that the earth is sinking in some places.</p> <p>Officials, though, think they might have found a solution in the sewers. Every day, the region's sanitation system takes a million gallons of treated wastewater and pumps it back into the Potomac Aquifer, a major source of drinking water for the area. And there are plans to increase that to 100 million gallons in the coming years.</p> <p>Around the country, cities and towns are increasingly turning to treated wastewater to augment their supplies of drinking water. The number of drinking-water reuse projects has quadrupled over the past two decades, according to data collected by the National Alliance for Water Innovation, a research program funded by the United States Department of Energy.</p> <p>"It is now necessary for us to consider options that would, in previous generations, be considered unthinkable," said Michael Kiparsky, director of the Wheeler Water Institute at the University of California, Berkeley.</p>

In the case of coastal Virginia, the goal is to stabilize groundwater to address two increasingly urgent problems. First, underground water depletion has led the ground to slowly sink and collapse in some places.

Homes and industries in the area draw around 155 million gallons of groundwater each day. Natural replenishment is much slower in confined aquifers like the Potomac, where layers of impermeable clays and rocks beneath the surface make it hard for rainwater to seep back into the ground.

Even if people stopped drawing groundwater today, it could still take thousands of years for the aquifer to refill, said Mark Bennett, who runs the Virginia and West Virginia Water Science Center for the United States Geological Survey.

Meanwhile, without enough water to help support the ground, underlying sediments fall in on themselves and the surface collapses.

The second big problem is that, as more and more freshwater gets pumped out, the loss of pressure has left the aquifer vulnerable to saltwater contamination as denser seawater encroaches underground.

In low-lying coastal areas like Hampton Roads, climate change exacerbates that problem. That's because as temperatures rise, ocean water expands in volume, causing sea levels to rise. And, glaciers on land [melt at a faster rate](#), adding even more water to the oceans.

That all leads to [increased flood risk](#) and helps saltwater intrude into freshwater sources.

A number of cities in the Hampton Roads region, like Virginia Beach and Norfolk, are less than 10 feet above sea level on average. Sea levels have already risen nearly 18 inches in the region in the past century, [according to data](#) from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

In response to the growing threats, the Hampton Roads Sanitation District, which manages wastewater in the region, began taking a more direct approach to groundwater replenishment in 2018 with a project called the Sustainable Water Initiative for Tomorrow, or SWIFT.

Although other water authorities around the country, like the Orange County Water District in California, have injected treated wastewater into underground aquifers to serve as barriers against seawater intrusion, the project was the first effort to do so in Virginia.

In fact, the state had no regulatory framework in place to oversee the underground injection of water. So, the sanitation district had to push for legislation to create oversight — an unusual situation, Dr. Kiparsky said, because you rarely see water districts asking for more regulation.

Today, the district's sewage systems capture wastewater and send it through wastewater treatment plants to remove nutrients and bacteria.

Then, each day at the SWIFT research center in Suffolk, Va., a million gallons of that water goes through additional treatment that disinfects, filters out harmful contaminants and pathogens, and brings the water up to drinking quality. The advanced treatment plant also adjusts things like acidity and dissolved oxygen levels so the water is appropriate for the aquifer.

It is essentially a "tricked-out drinking water plant," said Charles Bott, the district's director of water technology and research.

The treated water goes into the Potomac Aquifer via a recharge well 12 inches in diameter that releases it at intermittent levels between 500 and 1,400 feet below the surface. The aquifer acts as an environmental buffer, essentially providing another level of treatment as the water filters slowly through the soils, a process that can remove some pathogens and micropollutants.

By 2032, the district expects to treat and pump up to 100 million gallons of wastewater each day into the aquifer that would otherwise be released into the Elizabeth, James or York rivers. In addition to shoring up the aquifer, the project should also, when fully implemented, eliminate about [90 percent of the district's wastewater](#) discharge.

Turning wastewater into drinkable water is expensive. The next full-scale SWIFT plant, which will treat up to 16 million gallons of wastewater a day, is expected to cost upward of \$650 million, funded in part by customer fees and loans from the Environmental Protection Agency. That does not include maintenance and day-to-day operation, which will cost an estimated \$7.2 million a year.

But the sanitation district has calculated that putting wastewater through more intense treatment will help it get ahead on the costs of complying with [increasingly stringent](#) rules regulating pollution from the hundreds of treatment plants that regularly discharge wastewater into the Chesapeake Bay.

Planners expect the rules, which are mainly focused on excess nutrients that can harm marine life, to become more strict over time, said Jamie Mitchell, the Hampton Roads district's chief of technical services. It wouldn't be cost effective to make incremental upgrades "every five or 10 years to address new regulations," she said.

So far, the system appears to be "a win-win-win situation," said Dr. Kiparsky, because it addresses a range of issues: Land subsidence and saltwater intrusion, nutrient pollution in the Chesapeake Bay and growing costs for the district.

Even though the project is still in the early stages, researchers at the United States Geological Survey have already noted slight improvements in the aquifer.

Not long ago, such an idea would probably have been dismissed as too expensive and too unpleasant. Efforts in the 1990s to develop water reuse in San Diego and Los Angeles, for instance, were [beaten back by activists](#) who denounced what they called a "toilet to tap" system.

Today, the growing acceptance of wastewater reuse projects reflects a calculus that local governments increasingly have to consider as they confront pressures on water supply from climate change and population growth — even in the regions that don't face prolonged drought.

There are similar projects in California and other drought-stricken states like Texas that, in some cases, impose [mandatory water restrictions](#) on homes and businesses to cut down on consumption. Some of them even directly route treated wastewater for use as drinking water, without an environmental buffer like an aquifer.

One of the big advantages of wastewater, Dr. Kiparsky noted, is that there's always a reliable supply. He said using it to recharge aquifers was a complex but effective way of accomplishing a basic goal: returning water to where it came from.

"It's closing the loop on the urban water cycle," he said.

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HEADLINE	10/21 Snowmelt uncertain: grit, tradition prevail
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/21/us/northwest-snowpack-climate.html
GIST	<p>TROUT LAKE, Wash. — The sun set over the shoulder of Mount Adams at 8:38 p.m., and the temperature around the sacred stone circle fell quickly. People reached for jackets and blankets.</p> <p>Celebrating the mystery of the summer solstice in this corner of Southwest Washington, deep in the Cascades, means thinking about more than just darkness and light on the year's longest days. Land, sky and alpine air all seem bound together in the moment.</p>

Kirk Thomas, a druid priest, fixed his gaze toward the volcano's summit as the evening colors deepened from rose to purple and the ceremony neared its conclusion.

He offered up a blessing.

"May the snows always remain on the mountain," he said.

Lives, businesses, communities and cultures were founded on the premise of deep snow in this part of the Pacific Northwest.

Native Americans built lives around fishing and the seasonal harvest of camas roots and huckleberries. White settlers later made the area a breadbasket of fruit, wheat and cattle. What water didn't fall from the sky came from snowmelt and irrigation.

A pattern of moderation in temperature and precipitation extended through the network of river valleys that flow down from Mount Adams and Mount Hood, another volcano that looms some 50 miles south, across the border in Oregon. Both of them are huge, weather-shaping, snow-catcher mountains that are, for the moment, in seismic slumber: Hood, which stands at about 11,250 feet, was last active roughly 150 years ago; Adams, at 12,280 feet, hasn't erupted in a thousand years.

But the old predictability has been shattered by climate change. Questions of when the snow comes to the high country, when it melts to feed the rivers that supply irrigation and drinking water, how much of the region's water falls in rainstorms that dump torrents in hours — all these things have become more variable.

"Those volcanoes are the water towers for the region," said Anders E. Carlson, the president of the Oregon Glaciers Institute, a research group. "The wine you drink from river valleys that are fed by glacial meltwater, the salmon in your rivers — those are all intimately linked to a system that has been in equilibrium," he added. "But now we have perturbed that system."

Last year, grasshoppers hatched by the millions in a season of record-setting heat and drought. This spring was uncommonly wet and cool, triggering infestations of mold and other plant diseases that have plagued wheat and rye fields. Glaciers on the summits were in retreat last year with exposed patches of brown; this summer, the glistening white was back.

Some residents see days of despair ahead as climate projections point to an unfamiliar future. Others say that the local traditions of tenacity and adaptation will find a way. Around the perimeter of the two volcanoes, people are finding different ways of accommodating the new seasons of uncertainty.

Winter becomes summer

In 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt came to the high country above Portland, Ore., to dedicate the Timberline Lodge, built 6,000 feet up Mount Hood by the federal Works Progress Administration as an economic stimulus project during the Great Depression.

Giant wooden beams and stone walls speak of the work that produced the ski lodge, and the places from which the building components were cut or carved: the wet, ancient woods and volcanic lava fields.

Tire chains from the work trucks that clawed up and skidded down the primitive road during the construction were repurposed as fireplace screens. They hang there still before the hearths.

Hood is famous for its prodigious snows. Storms have sometimes buried the lodge to its roofline. Old photos show cars parked on top of snowbanks, with other cars buried in the snow below.

But the ways the seasons play out are changing, said Jeff Kohnstamm, the president and area operator of Timberline. Spring, in particular, has become harder to predict.

He thinks that skiing into July and August — and the economically important arrival of competitive teams that use the mountain for summer practice — will continue into the foreseeable future.

But as the pattern of snowfall becomes harder to predict, business during the other seasons, like mountain biking in summer, will become increasingly important. And Timberline plans to install its first-ever automated snow-making system to augment snowpack.

How we think about the seasons is in some ways a construction, like the lodge, built of patterns and expectations. Roosevelt alluded to that in his radio address from the lodge, years before the widespread awareness of human-caused climate change.

“We as a nation, I think, are coming to realize that summer isn’t the only season for play,” he said.

A bluegrass spring

Shelby Kayser sat straight up in the saddle on her 5-year-old American Paint horse named Lozzy, her eyes focused on the cattle as they bunched and bawled on the ramp into the truck.

The cattle were being trucked to high-country grazing lands, rather than the usual 30-mile cattle drive on horseback from the ranch, because an early-season heat wave in June made the trek too stressful for the animals.

They were late in going, too. Pastures nearer the ranch on the eastern slopes of the Cascades, in Centerville, Wash., had grown tall with grass in the wet spring. That raised the fire danger if the summer heat raged up, so the cattle were deployed as living mowers, eating down the risk.

Ranch life is always a balancing act: how to keep a herd healthy and productive, when and where to commit or pull back. Through five generations on the Kayser place, grit has been the currency.

When Ms. Kayser was in high school, her father, Nate, broke a leg on the first day of fall roundup. “It was a real bad, bad deal — he should have had surgery and pins and I mean rods and all kinds of stuff,” Ms. Kayser, 28, said as the truck lumbered up the mountain. “He told them to put it in a walking boot, and he tied it on the saddle with a gunny sack,” she said. “You won’t find anyone tougher.”

After the cattle were unloaded, Ms. Kayser walked over to examine the bulbous bluegrass, a wild plant growing on the shoulder of the dirt road. It’s high in protein and the cattle love it.

“Twice as tall as I’ve ever seen,” she said, bending over to yank a stalk of the grass. “Last year they were the shortest I can remember.”

Next year?

She shrugged.

An annual summer mystery

There are times in the winter when a patch of blue sky will open up at the center of the Trout Lake Valley, even as Mount Adams remains cloaked in cloud. Storms sometimes swerve around and miss the valley; other times they veer in and hit even harder.

Ancient mysteries of the earth and sky are alive and well, said Mr. Thomas, the druid priest.

He moved to Washington from Arizona in 2008 to open Trout Lake Abbey with a partner, Kozen Sampson. They divided up a former farm with a druid-pagan practice on one side, and a Zen Buddhist practice led by Mr. Sampson on the other.

Mr. Thomas, 70, said he had a spiritual revelation that the White Salmon River, which flows down from Mount Adams at the edge of the abbey, had a goddess, and that her name was Samona.

The story of Samona and the river, and how they illustrate the fragility of the earth, are part of what he talks about to visitors who come for retreats and ceremonies.

“If the river ceases to flow then the goddess ceases to be,” he said.

Pagans believe that the border between the day-to-day world and the deeper spirit world is porous, with liminal passageways through which gods and goddesses — of rivers or weather or other manifestations of nature — may cross. Rituals seek ways to thank those entities on the other side and offer gifts, so that they may give back.

During the solstice ceremony, Mr. Thomas smacked his wooden staff onto the stones, eyes clenched, seeking the borderland.

“Open the gate!” Mr. Thomas chanted. “Open the gate!” Sixteen people, some of whom had driven nine hours to be there, chanted along with him.

The sun slipped down the sky, illuminating what was left of the visible world.

‘Pears for your heirs’

Randy Kiyokawa’s parents met and fell in love during World War II in an internment camp in Tulelake, Calif., where thousands of Japanese Americans were sent in 1942.

A chance meeting helped shape the family’s outlook, he said — that even in calamity, hope and possibility persist.

“You make the best of it,” he said.

Mr. Kiyokawa, 61, is a third-generation fruit-grower in the Hood River Valley, where the forested slopes below Mount Hood are tempered by air circulating up from the Columbia River. He walked down a row of trees in his orchard, chatting casually with his workers.

“Cómo estás?” he said again and again.

He paused to touch a leaf in what almost looked like a caress.

Far more than growers of things like wheat or corn, who live by the monthly calendar, orchardists must peer years into the future.

Pears, the biggest crop at Kiyokawa Family Orchards, can take 12 years to reach full production. Every decision shapes a world you can’t see yet. “Pears for your heirs,” sums it up, Mr. Kiyokawa said.

Some short-term seasonal patterns have shifted. Elk herds now roam far from their old grazing lands as habitats have changed, and they can be hugely destructive to trees and their bark.

Hail storms have become more severe and frequent. Nets can protect the most valuable crops, like Honeycrisp apples, but they don’t make economic sense for the whole orchard, Mr. Kiyokawa said.

“The question every year now is, ‘How bad is the hail going to be?’”

‘A place that can speak to you’

Salmon are at the center of Yakama Nation culture, going back to the people who arrived thousands of years ago to the area around Mount Adams.

“The salmon stood up first to say, ‘I will provide,’” said Kate Valdez, the tribe’s historic preservation officer and a member of the Klickitat Band. That’s why, in any tribal feast, salmon is always given a place of honor at the table.

The tribe’s commitment had results and consequences.

“We’re going to have fish back in this river because of them, largely,” said G. Thomas Tebb, the director of the Office of the Columbia River at the Washington State Department of Ecology. “Even when the state Fish and Wildlife Department gave up on salmon, the Yakamas never did, and thank God they didn’t.”

A focus on salmon has in turn meant focusing on the cold water that salmon need in the streams and rivers that start on Mount Adams, at the reservation’s western edge. The tribe has become a pioneer in thinking about new methods of water storage, creating wetlands, staving off erosion.

“To see that mountain every day is a comfort, a place of peace and a place that can speak to you if you live in the area long enough to understand,” said Ms. Valdez, 46, who lives on the drier, eastern slopes of the mountain that are home to the tribe’s present-day reservation.

She sees a collision course looming between climate change, with glaciers in retreat on the mountain, and population growth downstream. More households will come, with second homes replacing farms, even as water supplies tighten.

So, as always, she said, you keep your eye on what is important and move forward.

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HEADLINE	10/20 ‘Scrabble variants’ poised for winter surge
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/20/health/variants-covid-winter-surge/index.html
GIST	<p>A flurry of new Covid-19 variants appears to be gaining traction globally, raising fears of a winter surge.</p> <p>In the United States, these are BQ.1, BQ.1.1, BF.7, BA.4.6, BA.2.75 and BA.2.75.2. In other countries, the recombinant variant XBB has been rising quickly and appears to be fueling a new wave of cases in Singapore. Cases are also rising in Europe and the UK, where these variants have taken hold.</p> <p>Dr. Peter Hotez, who co-directs the Center for Vaccine Development at Texas Children’s Hospital, says he thinks of them collectively as the Scrabble variants because they use letters that get high scores in the board game like Q, X and B.</p> <p>As the US moves into the fall, Covid-19 cases are dropping. Normally, that would be a reason for hope that the nation could escape the surges of the past two pandemic winters. But virus experts fear that the downward trend may soon reverse itself, thanks to this gaggle of new variants.</p> <p>Lumped together, the variants accounted for almost 1 in 3 new Covid-19 infections nationwide last week, according to the latest estimates from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>The updated bivalent booster vaccines and antiviral drugs like Paxlovid are expected to continue to be protective against severe outcomes from Covid-19 infections caused by the new variants.</p> <p>But the new variants are particularly devastating for millions of Americans who have weakened immune systems. New research suggests that changes in these variants make them impervious to the last lab-created antibodies available to help treat and prevent severe cases of Covid-19, and the US government has run out of money to incentivize the creation of new ones.</p> <p>A crowded field of rising variants</p>

It's not clear whether this gang of new variants will continue to run around together, each sharing a piece of the Covid-19 infection pie, or whether one will rise to outcompete the others, as has happened in previous surges.

Though they each descend from slightly different branches of the Omicron family tree, these new offshoots have evolved to share many of the same mutations, a phenomenon known as convergent evolution.

Some experts think this convergence means we've entered a new phase of the evolution of the virus, one that will see circulation of several variants at the same time.

"What is likely to happen is that we have several co-circulating, semi-dominate lineages going into the winter season," said Nathan Grubaugh, an associate professor of epidemiology at the Yale School of Public Health.

"That's because with convergent evolution, perhaps several different lineages can independently obtain similar transmissibility levels versus a single new variant taking over.

"This is what predominantly happens for most pathogens, such as the flu and RSV," Grubaugh wrote in an email. "Now that the virus has adapted pretty well to human transmission, most of what is circulating has high fitness."

Maria Van Kerkhove, the Covid-19 response technical lead for the World Health Organization, said Wednesday that the large mix of new variants was becoming more difficult for WHO to assess because countries were dialing back on their surveillance.

"So we need to be prepared for this. Countries need to be in a position to conduct surveillance, to deal with increases in cases and perhaps deal with increases and hospitalizations. We don't see a change in severity yet. And our vaccines remain effective, but we have to remain vigilant," she said.

Inaction gives the virus an edge

For now, the Omicron subvariant BA.5 still holds the top spot in the US. According to CDC estimates, it caused about 68% of new infections in the US last week, but it is quickly being outcompeted by several new sublineages – notably BQ.1 and BQ.1.1.

The BQs each caused just 6% of new infections in the US last week, but in recent weeks, the share of new Covid-19 infections caused by these viruses has doubled every six to seven days – a rapid rate of growth against BA.5, which is already a highly fit virus, says Dr. Anthony Fauci, who directs the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

And these are just two of the new crop of Omicron descendants making a move.

"The projections vary a little, but generally, most people feel somewhere in the middle of November that they'll wind up being a substantial proportion and have bumped BA.5 off as the dominant variant," Fauci told CNN.

These variants are different from BA.4 and BA.5, but they're descended from those viruses, the result of genetic drift. So they share many parts of their genomes with that virus.

Their changes aren't on the scale of what happened when the original Omicron arrived on the scene in November 2021. That strain of the virus, which is now long gone, came out of genetic left field, leaving researchers and public health officials scrambling to catch up.

Fauci says that this time, we are as ready as we could be for the latest batch of variants.

“It isn’t that different from BA.5 that it would completely escape the protection that you would get from vaccine” – if people would just get the shot, Fauci said.

The bivalent booster vaccine, authorized in September, protects against the original strain of the coronavirus as well as the BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants.

“We have a BA.5 bivalent updated vaccine as a booster that we’re pushing people to do. It’s matched against the still-dominant variant, which is BA.5, and almost certainly will have a reasonably good degree of cross-protection against the BQ.1.1 and the others, and yet the uptake of these vaccines, as we are already in the middle of October, is disappointing,” he said.

According to the latest data from the CDC, 14.8 million people have gotten an updated bivalent booster six weeks into the campaign promoting it. That’s less than 10% of the population that’s eligible to get one.

The poor uptake of the new boosters, combined with the immune evasiveness of the new variants and the waning of population immunity, is almost surely a recipe for rising cases and hospitalizations in the weeks ahead.

“It’s probably going to be significantly bigger than the BA.5 wave, at least that’s what I expect,” said Mark Zeller, a project scientist who monitors variants at the Scripps Research Institute. But Zeller says he doesn’t expect this winter’s surge to reach heights of January’s Omicron wave.

Hotez says people shouldn’t panic about this news but should pay attention.

“We’re underperforming as a nation with people getting their bivalent boosters,” Hotez said.

The genetic changes these variants share appear to help them escape the immunity created by vaccines and past infections – a recipe for reinfections and breakthrough infections, particularly for people who haven’t had an updated booster.

Critical therapies could soon stop working

Crucially, some of the variants also appear to be impervious to the last lab-created antibodies available to ward off severe Covid-19 infections: an antibody treatment called bebtelovimab, which is made by Eli Lilly, and the combination of two long-acting antibodies in Evusheld, a shot made by AstraZeneca that helps keep people who are immunocompromised from getting sick in the first place.

If these antibodies stop working against the virus, the United States will still have Covid-19 antiviral drugs like Paxlovid, molnupiravir and remdesivir to help those at risk of severe complications.

But antibody therapies are particularly important for people with immune function that has been blunted by drugs, disease or age. These are the same people whose bodies don’t respond robustly to vaccines.

The antibodies are also needed to help people who can’t take antiviral therapies because of possible reactions with other medications.

White House Covid-19 Response Coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha says the federal government has been spurring the development of new monoclonal antibodies during the pandemic by promising to purchase new therapies after they’re made.

The government can’t do that anymore, he said, because Congress has declined to pass additional funding for the Covid-19 response.

As a result, development of new antibodies – and other new therapeutics – is lagging.

“So even if we got money today, it would take us many months to bring a monoclonal into the marketplace, and we don’t have the money today anyway,” Jha told CNN.

	<p>US without 'adequate' Covid-19 tests this winter due to congressional inaction, White House says</p> <p>Jha said that means the nation is facing fall and winter with a smaller arsenal against the virus, just when it needs to expand its options.</p> <p>“There is not a monoclonal sitting ready to go tomorrow that we could just buy off the shelf,” he said.</p> <p>Antibodies are a losing proposition for companies because it takes millions of dollars of investment to make them and because the virus is evolving so fast, they might be effective for only a few months.</p> <p>“That is a terrible business model,” Jha said.</p> <p>The administration has been thinking about ways to commercialize some parts of the Covid-19 response – to get out of the business of buying vaccines and therapies – ultimately passing the costs on to consumers and insurers. But Jha says the process has to be guided by “the needs on the ground and the realities of the virus.”</p> <p>He says current realities require that the government continue to incentivize the production of new therapies, and he expects that the Biden administration will again try to ask Congress to pass more funding to do that.</p> <p>“And the truth is that if we want monoclonals to protect high-risk people – which we do – then at this point, given the speed of viral evolution, the US government has to be a major player in that role,” Jha said. “The market cannot take care of it by itself.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Norway on edge over drone sightings
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/norway-on-edge-over-mysterious-drone-sightings-and-arrest-of-russians/ar-AA13atHS
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS — Norwegian officials warned Thursday that there could be more arrests after at least seven Russians — including the son of a close associate of President Vladimir Putin — were detained in the span of weeks for flying drones or taking pictures near sensitive areas, prompting an investigation by the domestic intelligence service.</p> <p>The news comes as Norway and other countries move to secure critical infrastructure in the wake of the sabotage of the Nord Stream gas pipelines. It follows weeks of reports of drone sightings in its vast offshore oil and gas fields, as well as recent sightings at Norwegian airports.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Norway’s prime minister, Jonas Gahr Store, blamed foreign intelligence — and indirectly pointed a finger at Russia. “It is not acceptable that foreign intelligence is flying drones over Norwegian airports. Russians are not allowed to fly drones in Norway,” he said, according to Norwegian broadcaster NRK.</p> <p>Offshore oil and gas installations are central to Norway’s economy. Since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the country has become a critical supplier to energy-starved Europe.</p> <p>Store’s remarks came hours after a drone was spotted near the airport in Bergen, the country’s second-most-populous city, temporarily shutting down air traffic.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Existing home sales fall to 10yr-low
SOURCE	https://www.cnbc.com/2022/10/20/existing-home-sales-fall-to-a-10-year-low-in-september.html
GIST	Existing homes are selling at the slowest pace since September 2012, with the exception of a brief drop at the start of the Covid 19 pandemic .

Sales of previously owned homes fell 1.5% in September from August to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.71 million units, according to a monthly survey from the National Association of Realtors.

That marked the eighth straight month of sales declines. Sales were lower by 23.8% year over year.

[Sharply higher mortgage rates](#) are causing an abrupt slowdown in the housing market. The average rate on the 30-year fixed home loan is now just over 7%, after starting this year around 3%. That is making an already pricey housing market even less affordable.

Despite the slowdown in sales, inventory continues to drop. There were 1.25 million homes for sales at the end of September, down 0.8% compared with September 2021. At the current sales pace, that represents a 3.2-month supply. Six months is considered a balanced supply.

“Despite weaker sales, multiple offers are still occurring with more than a quarter of homes selling above list price due to limited inventory,” said Lawrence Yun, chief economist at the NAR. “The current lack of supply underscores the vast contrast with the previous major market downturn from 2008 to 2010, when inventory levels were four times higher than they are today.”

Tight supply continues to put pressure on home prices. The median price of an existing home sold in September was \$384,800, an increase of 8.4% from September 2021. Prices climbed at all price points. This makes 127 consecutive months of annual increases.

Prices are cooling, however. September marked the third straight month-to-month price decline, which usually fall this time of this year.

They’re falling harder this year, though, particularly on the lower end of the market, where inventory is much leaner. Homes priced between \$100,000 and \$250,000 dropped 28.4% from a year ago, while sales of homes priced between \$750,000 and \$1 million declined 9.5%.

Homes did sit on the market slightly longer in September, an average of 19 days, up from 16 days in August and 17 days in September 2021.

Higher mortgage rates aren’t just spooking potential buyers. They’re keeping sellers on the sidelines as well, which adds to the inventory crunch.

“Homeowners love their 3% mortgage rate, and they don’t want to give that up,” Yun said.

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HEADLINE	10/20 Radioactive waste melter startup halted
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/state/washington/article267577547.html
GIST	<p>RICHLAND, WA - The heat up of world’s largest radioactive waste melter at the Hanford site vitrification plant in Eastern Washington has not started as hoped.</p> <p>The melter temperature was expected to climb to 2,100 degrees Fahrenheit over about two weeks this month, but the heating was halted before 300 degrees was reached.</p> <p>The Department of Energy’s Hanford manager Brian Vance made the announcement at a Wednesday evening meeting of the Hanford Advisory Board.</p> <p>When heating of the melter was started it was not expected to be turned off over the next five years to avoid damaging melter components.</p>

The plan was to run it continuously and also bring a second melter online that would both be used to commission the plant with a nonradioactive waste simulant and then to start treating radioactive waste as soon as the end of next year.

But the melter temperature has now been allowed to cool to the ambient temperature while troubleshooting is done on the electrical system, Vance said.

The cool down has not damaged the melter, he said.

The melter was still empty, with no materials to practice glassifying waste added, when the decision was made to stop the heating and slowly bring the temperature down over a couple of days.

LEAST RADIOACTIVE WASTE FIRST

Construction began 20 years ago on the Waste Treatment Plant, or vitrification plant, with heat up of the first melter at the plant this month a crucial step toward a goal of starting to glassify radioactive waste for permanent disposal.

The Hanford nuclear reservation adjoining Richland, Wash., was used during World War II and the Cold War to produce nearly two-thirds of the plutonium for the nation's nuclear weapons program.

Uranium fuel irradiated at Hanford's nine reactors was reprocessed at the site to chemically remove plutonium from the metal, leaving 56 million gallons of radioactive and other hazardous chemical waste stored in underground tanks.

Although the plant was initially planned to start treating all tank waste simultaneously, plans changed when technical issues were raised in 2012 concerning how the plant handles the most radioactive components in the waste.

Most construction on parts of the plant that will handle high level waste has been stalled since then and talks are underway between the federal and Washington state officials on how to treat the worst of the tank waste.

Initially, the vitrification plant will only treat some of the least radioactive tank waste, called low activity or low level waste.

MELTER HEAT UP STOPPED OCT. 8

Heat up of the first of the two 300-ton melters in the vitrification plant's Low Activity Waste Facility began Saturday, Oct. 8. Hanford officials called it a "significant step" then.

But the heat up was halted just after midnight the morning of Monday, Oct. 10, after indications that the power supply to the startup heaters was not what was expected, Vance said.

One of three power supply cabinets for the project overheated, according to Hanford officials.

Now troubleshooting is underway to form a detailed understanding of the cause of the problem, resolve the issue, analyze how operators performed and then to teach operators on other around-the-clock shifts to deal with the issue if it happens again, Vance said.

He gave no estimate of when the melter heat-up might be started again.

MELTER DECISION

Bechtel called worker performance in identifying and responding to the issue with the power supply "a demonstration in operational excellence."

	<p>“Heating up the melter is a complex process that consists of a series of activities over at least several weeks to prepare for and establish a molten pool of glass that will eventually be used to vitrify low level tank waste,” Bechtel said.</p> <p>Plans call for adding glass beads, or frit, in batches to be melted during the initial test run. The molten glass that results will be poured into a stainless steel container and removed from the building.</p> <p>During waste treatment, the glass forming material will be combined with low activity radioactive waste to form a stable glass material that will be buried in steel containers at a lined landfill at Hanford.</p> <p>“The detailed and methodical process for melter heat up has been planned in a way that allows for issues identified during the complex startup to be effectively and safely addressed,” Bechtel said.</p> <p>Issues are expected to be identified and resolved throughout the process to prepare the Low Activity Waste Facility to glassify waste, it said.</p> <p>Max Woods, representing the Oregon Department of Energy on the advisory board, praised the decision to stop the melter heat up.</p> <p>“That’s a showcase project for the nation, for cleanup,” he said. “That fact that your operators stopped instead of pushing on is a success.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Warning signs: hiring in WA at tipping point
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/warning-signs-hiring-in-wa-may-be-at-a-tipping-point/
GIST	<p>For much of the pandemic, hiring in Seattle and across Washington outpaced the rest of the nation, thanks in part to a red-hot tech sector.</p> <p>But there are growing signs — with lower hiring in tech, education and construction — that Washington’s job market could be, as one economist puts it, “at the top of the roller coaster, about to plummet.”</p> <p>Washington employers added just 1,500 jobs in September, according to the state Employment Security Department’s monthly report posted this week.</p> <p>That’s a huge drop from the nearly 22,000 jobs added in August. And while August was an unusually big month, hiring in September was barely a tenth of what Washington had been averaging each month since January 2021.</p> <p>It’s also well behind national trends: Washington has 2.3% of the nation’s population, but accounted for barely half a percent of U.S. job growth in September, says Jacob Vigdor, an economist with the University of Washington Evans School of Public Policy who follows state and local job markets.</p> <p>After “many months where Washington’s job growth rate outpaced the nation’s, that picture doesn’t look so great now,” Vigdor said.</p> <p>Another worrying data point: Washington’s unemployment rate was 3.7% in September, unchanged from August and July.</p> <p>Although low unemployment can be a sign of strong hiring, the fact that Washington’s appears stuck “creates worries that the [hiring] trendline is about to change direction,” warned Vigdor. The result, he said, is a labor market that feels perched “at the top of the roller coaster, about to plummet.”</p> <p>Some industries, such as shipping, tech and business services, saw hiring gains in September. But that growth was nearly erased by large declines in others, including manufacturing and construction, which lost 1,300 and 300 jobs, respectively.</p>

The biggest loser was the public sector, where employment fell by nearly 8,000 jobs, notably in local and state-level education.

“We usually expect to see large gains in government employment from August to September, as the school year begins for public K-12 schools and public colleges and universities,” said Anneliese Vance-Sherman, a regional economist with the Employment Security Department who covers the Seattle area.

Instead, Vance-Sherman said, education hiring appeared well below normal September levels.

In some industries, hiring is still feeling the effects of the pandemic.

At many colleges and public K-12 schools, for example, enrollment remains low because many students shifted to home schooling and private schooling due to COVID-19, which in turn may have meant fewer new openings for teachers. Enrollment in Seattle Public Schools this year is the lowest it has been since 2015.

Higher interest rates and recession fears also have contributed to sluggish hiring in September. Higher mortgage costs, for example, have cut demand for new homes and other construction, which likely has hurt construction hiring.

And, for all the focus on falling demand, many Washington employers still can’t find enough workers in a labor market that remains unusually tight, experts say.

This year, elementary and middle schools in Washington expect to need an additional 1,600 employees for openings that can’t be filled internally, said James McCafferty, co-director at the Center for Economic & Business Research at Western Washington University, citing data from Chmura Economics and Analytics.

“We’re short on subs,” Amy Fenning, a multilingual services specialist at Federal Way Public Schools, said about the ongoing shortage of substitute teachers.

Fenning said the district sometimes turns to retired teachers to fill in when teacher are absent, and “sometimes, we can’t find a sub and I’m thrown into a classroom.”

Inflation also has hurt labor supply. As mortgages, rents and other living expenses have soared, employers in expensive areas like Seattle have had an even harder time filling openings, especially for lower-wage service jobs.

At Seattle-area hotels, restaurants and other leisure and hospitality businesses, for example, hiring was almost flat over the summer, even as many businesses tried to take advantage of surging consumer demand.

Overall, the total leisure and hospitality workforce in the Seattle area (which the ESD defines as King and Snohomish counties) in September was still missing 20,000, or 11.5%, of the jobs it had in September 2019.

The next few months will be critical as Washington employers gauge the risks of inflation, a potential winter surge in coronavirus cases and a recession that already seems to be affecting the region’s economic secret weapon, the tech sector.

For much of the pandemic, tech’s steady job growth largely made up for losses in other sectors, and its high salaries are still enough, as Vigdor put it, to “shrug off” soaring mortgages rates.

That’s one reason the Seattle area’s information industry, which includes many tech companies, has 20% more jobs than it did in September 2019. It’s also a big reason the region has recovered faster than much of the rest of the state.

	<p>But that counterbalance may no longer be as assured, given the economic headwinds facing the tech sector, where Amazon and Microsoft have indicated hiring slowdowns and Microsoft announced job cuts.</p> <p>Vigdor didn't predict a repeat of the prior recessions. But he said the Seattle area and Washington state could face "a double whammy, with both white- and blue-collar job growth stagnating."</p> <p>After more than a decade of growth, that would represent a major economic shock. "When you're a growing city, the growth itself becomes a big part of the local economy," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Sawant criticizes SPD for no poop probe
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-councilmember-sawant-says-her-property-is-being-vandalized-criticizes-police-investigation/
GIST	<p>Seattle Councilmember Kshama Sawant criticized the city's police department Wednesday for its response to repeated "disturbing incidents" at her home.</p> <p>According to Sawant, bags of human excrement have been thrown on the lawn of her private residence six times, including as recently as last week, and the Seattle Police Department has failed to properly investigate.</p> <p>"The material used in these repeated attacks is classified as biohazardous waste. The police informed me the material can't be sent to their lab for further investigation due to its hazardous nature. That seems quite odd considering that hospital labs do tests on human fecal matter all the time, but it does speak to the danger of having it repeatedly thrown in one's yard," Sawant wrote in a letter to police and city leadership on Wednesday, noting she had to call poison control on one instance after her dogs got into the bag of waste.</p> <p>"Most concerning is the very high likelihood that this extreme and hostile behavior is politically motivated, and could turn into more serious and dangerous harassment," she added, noting past threats made against her.</p> <p>According to Sawant, the police have failed to seriously investigate the incidents reported by her and her husband, including ignoring two witnesses, refusing to test the fecal matter, not taking video evidence collected by a neighbor and not investigating a recent email sent to Sawant in which the sender calls her the "the queen of [expletive]" and tells her to "sit on [her] throne of human excrement."</p> <p>The police department would not release any reports related to the incidents on Wednesday, citing the investigation as ongoing, but said it is doing its due diligence to investigate Sawant's claims.</p> <p>"The department takes incidents involving public officials seriously, and investigators have canvassed for evidence, gathered information from witnesses and reviewed everything collected thus far," a statement from the department read. "At this time, the department has not found any evidence this case would meet the city or state standards for hate crime laws, but SPD will follow available leads should new information arise. The department encourages anyone with additional information about this case to contact police."</p> <p>SPD Detective Patrick Michaud said Wednesday that the report doesn't meet state or city standards for a hate crime, but the department would continue to investigate.</p> <p>Michaud did not share whether any other local elected official had any open harassment complaints or complaints related to incidents at Sawant's house, citing a policy against identifying victims.</p> <p>Last month the council unanimously passed a resolution "condemning harassment, threats, and political violence against elected officials, election workers, those seeking elected office, and other public servants," in step with the Metropolitan King County Council passing similar legislation. The resolution</p>

followed an [incident this summer](#) in which the Rev. Cary Anderson of Seattle's First AME Church was reportedly shot with a BB gun while campaigning for a vacant seat in Washington's 30th Legislative District.

Harassment or provocation of local elected officials came to the forefront in Seattle during protests against police violence in summer 2020, when activists went to the homes of several City Council members and some, including Councilmember Alex Pedersen and now-President Debora Juarez, [reported intimidating behavior](#) like written messages left at their homes. Then-Mayor Jenny Durkan was the subject of significant protests at her home and enough reported [threats and harassment](#) that she had [SPD staff round-the-clock security detail at her home](#) for her last year in office.

As a socialist and the furthest political outlier on the council, Sawant has faced opposition from the community ranging from a [failed recall attempt in 2021](#) to death threats [during the first months of her time on the council in 2014](#) and [as recently as last winter](#).

Mayor Bruce Harrell, who is in Buenos Aires for a summit of international mayors, spoke to Sawant on Wednesday after being named in her SPD complaint letter, according to the Mayor's Office.

"These incidents go against our core values as a city. Elected officials should not be harassed at their homes. While Mayor Harrell does not direct individual investigations, we have been assured that SPD will follow all standard protocols and practices regarding these incidents in the appropriate manner," a spokesperson for the mayor wrote Wednesday. "The mayor has spoken directly to Councilmember Sawant to discuss and understand her concerns."

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HEADLINE	10/20 SPD asks public help: ID poop thrower
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/seattle-police-searching-man-throwing-bags-feces-councilmembers-house/281-9248dd06-2819-442a-b584-63947e346402
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The Seattle Police Department (SPD) is asking the public for help identifying a man who is suspected of throwing bags of human feces on a Seattle City councilmember's yard.</p> <p>Councilmember Kshama Sawant has reported several incidents of this happening at her home in the Leschi neighborhood this month.</p> <p>Sawant sent a letter to the mayor and SPD that read, in part:</p> <p>"Most concerning is the very high likelihood that this extreme and hostile behavior is politically motivated and could turn into more serious and dangerous harassment," she wrote.</p> <p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell released a statement in response to the letter that read:</p> <p><i>"These incidents go against our core values as a city. Elected officials should not be harassed at their homes. While Mayor Harrell does not direct individual investigations, we have been assured that SPD will follow all standard protocols and practices regarding these incidents in the appropriate manner. The Mayor has spoken directly to Councilmember Sawant to discuss and understands her concerns."</i></p> <p>According to SPD, the department has not found any evidence this case would meet the city or state standards for hate crime laws, but they will follow available leads should new information arise.</p> <p>"The department takes incidents involving public officials seriously, and investigators have canvassed for evidence, gathered information from witnesses and reviewed everything collected thus far," SPD wrote in a statement.</p> <p>Anyone with information about this suspect is urged to call the SPD tip line at 206-233-5000.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Kirkland to pilot 'sound, video' cameras
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/traffic/traffic-news/cameras-for-loud-cars-kirkland-pilot-study/281-023f1926-e31e-4747-bad0-9af6787456ba
GIST	<p>KIRKLAND, Wash. — Speed and red light cameras are common across western Washington. Now, new technology could be on the way to nab cars, trucks and motorcycles that make too much noise.</p> <p>Kirkland is the first city in the state to deploy a six-month pilot program that will capture sound and video at specific intersections and analyze the clips to determine whether they violate state noise laws.</p> <p>Kirkland Police Chief Cherie Harris said as it stands now, enforcing vehicle noise laws is nearly impossible.</p> <p>"The problem is officers having the time to do that and all that it would really take to do enforcement," she said. "This is targeted at drivers who are creating noise on purpose."</p> <p>Two locations that will see the devices in Kirkland are Central Way at 6th Street and Lake Washington Blvd at 59th near Houghton Beach Park. The Houghton Beach location is already operational.</p> <p>That's where Dan Japhet walks his dog, Briggs, every day. He hears the racket as traffic howls by.</p> <p>"The motorcycles are the worst," he said. "I don't get it. They must really like the sound of those motorcycles. I sure don't."</p> <p>Kirkland police say complaints about noisy, speeding vehicles have more than tripled since last year. "It's a deterrent to happy living in Kirkland," said Chief Harris.</p> <p>Kirkland is trying to avoid the noise and chaos that have occurred in parts of King and Pierce counties in recent years when hundreds have gathered to watch street racing, leading to injury and burnt vehicles.</p> <p>"We don't want Kirkland to become a place where street racers will feel comfortable," said Harris. "We have had street racing incidents that have occurred here. Vehicles are coming in full of people who actually take over streets. It's a fairly dangerous situation. I certainly hope they will avoid this city."</p> <p>The city paid the company Cithaeron \$15,000 to complete the study.</p> <p>The technology is similar to how school zone cameras capture speeders, except along with video, microphones are used, as well.</p> <p>"Each microphone is operating independently to capture sound from a vehicle. Then it's fed back through an algorithm that determines the distance and aggregate sound pressure for the vehicle," explained Cithaeron CEO Sol Keiter.</p> <p>A ticket would then be issued to the registered owner of the vehicle.</p> <p>In a video posted to the city's YouTube page, purple dots show the "noise" from a pickup truck registering 100 decibels. That's the same level as a jackhammer.</p> <p>However, some are already expressing concern over the technology.</p> <p>While unable to comment on this particular project, Jennifer Lee, technology and liberty project manager at the ACLU of Washington said, "We do have serious concerns about expanding camera surveillance networks that automate law enforcement. These systems may not actually solve the problem they were intended to solve while creating new and bigger problems through overbroad data collection and mass surveillance, which can chill freedom of movement, speech, religion, association, and assembly. The city and the state should protect the privacy of its residents and visitors."</p>

	<p>No tickets or warnings will be issued during the pilot program and no personal information is being shared with police, according to Keiter.</p> <p>"This is only a feasibility study," said Chief Harris.</p> <p>The results of the study will be sent to lawmakers in Olympia next June where they will determine whether to pass a law to allow the devices to be rolled out.</p> <p>The legal decibel level allowed is still to be determined.</p> <p>For Japhet and Briggs, they just want some peace on their walks.</p> <p>"I just don't believe that kind of noise should be tolerated," Japhet said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Drought, fire risk elevated in La Niña winter
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/weather/la-nina-weather-pattern-returns-this-winter/507-92127a67-a2dd-41db-9428-9b1f9fd00b34
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Drought and wildfire risks will remain elevated in the western states while warmer than average temperatures will greet the Southwest, Gulf Coast and East Coast this winter, federal weather officials said Thursday.</p> <p>La Niña, a weather pattern characterized by cold ocean temperatures in the equatorial Pacific Ocean, is returning for a rare third winter, officials with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said. That means December, January and February are likely to bring drier than average conditions across the southern states and wetter than average weather for areas including the Great Lakes and Pacific Northwest.</p> <p>The forecast means droughts that have punished the Great Plains and western states are likely to continue, the agency said. Wildfires will remain a risk, and some parts of the country will likely be in greater danger than before, said Brad Pugh, the operational drought lead with NOAA's Climate Prediction Center.</p> <p>"One of the areas, over the next couple months, that is likely to have enhanced wildfire danger will be the south-central U.S. — Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas," Pugh said. "Very dry conditions there. With that dryness, that will be an area for high wildfire danger in the coming three months."</p> <p>Drought conditions are going on across about 59% of the country, NOAA officials said, and they have persisted in the western states since late 2020. The continued La Niña climate pattern means that is likely to expand to the Gulf Coast as well, NOAA said.</p> <p>The Gulf Coast is also one of the parts of the country likely to experience higher than average temperatures, NOAA said. The higher temperatures are also likely to climb up the East Coast all the way to the New England states, the agency said.</p> <p>Some parts of the northern U.S., including the Pacific Northwest and portions of the Great Lakes states, could see colder temperatures than usual, NOAA said.</p> <p>Judah Cohen, director of seasonal forecasting for AER, a Massachusetts-based atmospheric research firm, said NOAA's predictions dovetail with his expectations for the coming winter.</p> <p>"I would definitely lean on a milder winter, especially east of the Rockies," Cohen said. "Wetter to the north, drier to the south."</p> <p>The southern Rockies, southern plains and most of the southeastern states are also looking at drier than average conditions, NOAA officials said. The winter weather is also expected to bring drought to the middle and lower Mississippi Valley, they said.</p>

	<p>Drought has had major consequences in states like California in recent years, including hurting agriculture operations, spurring water use cutbacks and elevating the risk of wildfires. NOAA's prediction does call for improved conditions in some drought areas, including parts of Montana and Idaho, but predictions call for a deepening drought in many others.</p> <p>NOAA's forecast is similar to projections from computer-based models, said Ryan Maue, a private meteorologist based in Atlanta. Many parts of the country that could use a wet or snowy year are unlikely to get one, he said.</p> <p>"I think the bottom line is we're on a continuation of what we've been seeing over the last year, including last winter, and there's not expected to be improvement in the drought situation across California and the center of the United States," Maue said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Wildfires, smoke problematic for fire crews
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/wildfires-smoke-continue-be-problematic-fire-crews-throughout-washington/VCHZJJXX5NGE5J5VJEVRM6ALJE/
GIST	<p>Monroe, WA. – Wildfires in Western Washington continue to produce a ton of smoke filling the air, taking a toll on everyone.</p> <p>According the current incident commander Leonard Johnson, the Bolt Creek Fire has burned 14,776 acres and is 43% contained. KIRO 7 asked Johnson if there could have been a strategy that could have helped to contain the smoke. Johnson says there is a simple answer: no. He says the main strategies for them is to make sure the public is safe and no homes and cities are in harm's way.</p> <p>"Our strategies are always to protect the public first. You know, to take care of the fire as best we can and keep people safe," Johnson said.</p> <p>Johnson broke down exactly how crews are attacking the Bolt Creek Fire to KIRO 7.</p> <p>"The lower portion of the fire sits in a full suppression strategy. Which means we work to build containment lines. We work directly on the fire or we build indirect fire lines that will carry fire to in order to help the fire move in the direction we need it to," Johnson said.</p> <p>"The purpose behind that part of the strategy is to contain fire where it's moving through fuels and to make sure it is out or it won't continue to consume acreage," Johnson said.</p> <p>Johnson and other crews say when they come up with a game plan, they have to take into account several factors before they begin.</p> <p>"It's in steep terrain. So, even if we are getting containment lines around it, there is still interior portions of the fire that are going to continue to burn," Johnson said.</p> <p>"You know sometimes the winds are blowing so hard that we can't even use aircrafts," Kim Zargaris with the Western Fire Chiefs Association said.</p> <p>"The strategy really isn't changing other than I will tell you this: the faster we initially attack a fire and throw resources at it and try to prevent from getting larger, the better off we will be," Zargaris said.</p> <p>And Johnson says he understands people's concerns about the smoke.</p> <p>"Because when Mother Nature does that, it holds the fire in position, we can't get to it as easily. Helicopters can't fly on it. Aircraft can't fly on it. Personnel on the ground can't see it as well," Johnson said.</p>

	<p>And he believes the fire season is still in effect.</p> <p>“But up until that event gets here Friday on the Bolt Fire, no. It’s not over,” Johnson said.</p> <p>“There’s a lot of tired people out here. There’s a lot of resources that have fought this particular fire for the last 30 days. And we are at the time of the season where we just can’t get any more resources,” Johnson said.</p> <p>Currently, crews are still along Highway 2 in King/Snohomish County monitoring the situation.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Seattle air quality among worst in world
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattles-air-quality-among-worst-world-second-day-row/T3LLXXLHYNFQ5D6C2Z4SGKHA7Q/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Heavy smoke from wildfires continues to reduce air quality in Seattle and Western Washington, and an air quality alert has been extended for a second time.</p> <p>On Thursday, the poor air quality landed Seattle the top spot for the worst air quality in the world among major cities for the second day in a row, according to IQAir’s air quality and pollution city ranking.</p> <p>After starting Wednesday in the top 5, Seattle fluctuated up and down in the top 15 before taking the top spot in the afternoon. On Thursday, Seattle started at #2, with Portland, Oregon at #1, but by 8 a.m. was once again at #1.</p> <p>By 10:30 p.m. Thursday night, Seattle had fallen back to #2, with Beijing, China at #1.</p> <p>Since Friday evening, most of Western Washington has been under an air quality alert, which was supposed to end Monday afternoon, but was extended until 5 p.m. Thursday. On Wednesday afternoon, the air quality alert was extended again, this time until midnight Thursday.</p> <p>Wildfires have compromised air quality on and off for weeks. Two of the largest fires are the Bolt Creek Fire near Skykomish, that has burned more than 14,000 acres and is about 43% contained, and the Loch Katrine Fire about 30 miles east of Seattle, that has burned more than 1,200 acres.</p> <p>The Puget Sound Clean Air Agency issued a wildfire smoke alert for the Puget Sound region, saying wildfire smoke will cause the air quality to rise to unhealthy levels near active fires. That alert remains in effect.</p> <p>At the Downtown Park in Bellevue, people were still making the rounds once the sun came up Wednesday morning.</p> <p>Harshit “Hoss” Manoch said the air quality numbers were jarring when he left his home in the early morning.</p> <p>“It’s pretty bad, actually!” he said. “I came from my home right now and I realized AQ is 173!”</p> <p>But Manoch didn’t let the conditions keep him from his morning exercise.</p> <p>“I’m on a morning run, it’s a daily routine,” he said.</p> <p>Wearing a Paris Saint-Germain soccer jersey, Manoch kept to his run but also admitted that the smoke and haze was having an impact.</p>

Motioning to his nose and head, he said, “I do feel the smoke in here, I do feel a little inside with the smoke coming in. It’s not good for sure.”

“You really do have to take care of yourself in this weather, especially people who are allergic or asthmatics,” Deepali Saxena said as she made her morning walk in the park.

Saxena told KIRO 7 that’s she’s a yoga instructor and that her exercise involves deep breathing and breathing exercises. She said a few really deep breaths in the morning can help nearly everyone, but with air quality in question it might be best to do it indoors.

“Very gently, normal breathing. Just try it because whatever we inhale we don’t exhale at that count,” said Saxena.

Hadene Klassnik was walking her dog, Yogi Bear, in Bellevue’s Downtown Park early Wednesday. She says she comes outside every single day to walk her dog regardless of the conditions, though the air quality has been difficult for days.

“It’s not much, fun is it?” she said.

KIRO 7’s crew approached her with questions about air quality and the Bellevue resident just groaned and admitted the haze around her home was ruining what normally is a beautiful setting.

“I took a picture and sent it to my husband. He’s in Spain at the moment and he said, ‘What! Can’t even see the lake,” said Klassnik.

Some of the worst air quality markers have been on the Eastside during this latest stretch of smoke and haze, but Klassnik is still taking it in stride, saying, “it could be worse.”

Manoch also is holding out hope that the haze and poor air quality will end soon.

“Two more days. Rain is coming in, so waiting for that,” said Manoch.

Places registering as having hazardous air quality as of Wednesday morning were in Snoqualmie, where a brush fire broke out on Wednesday morning, Skykomish, near the Bolt Creek Fire, and a location in Bellingham.

Luckily, rain is forecast to move into the region on Friday, when air quality should improve.

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HEADLINE	10/20 Areas charred by wildfires risk landslides
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/areas-charred-by-wildfires-now-risk-landslides/FSVVV6DIA5GPLAGRZJFJ2KQACM/
GIST	<p>With rain in the forecast this weekend following a very dry summer, with multiple wildfires leaving burn scars across the Cascades, there are concerns about the possibility of debris flows, or landslides, and other problems.</p> <p>A burn scar is the scorched earth left behind after a wildfire. These areas are prone to debris flows and flooding, especially in steep terrain, because burned soil can repel water that would usually be absorbed. As a result, much less rainfall is needed to cause a flash flood, according to the National Weather Service.</p> <p>Of particular concern are burn scars left by the ongoing Bolt Creek Fire near Skykomish. Some of the land in that area is now at higher risk of flash floods, landslides and debris flows, according to King County Natural Resources and Parks.</p>

The Washington State Department of Transportation even warned people in that area along U.S. 2 that with the addition of rain, the highway could close again if debris ends up on the road. Since the fire started in September, there have been multiple closures of the highway due to trees and rocks falling onto the highway.

“Be prepared: go to the grocery store, pick up prescriptions & restock emergency supplies,” WSDOT said in a tweet.

So what is a debris flow? Here’s what the Seattle office of the National Weather Service said.

Debris flows are “fast-moving, deadly landslides” that are “powerful mixtures of mud, rocks, boulders and entire trees,” and sometimes even homes or cars.

The flows most commonly happen during intense rainfall following wildfires. NWS said the intensity, rather than the duration, matters more and a debris flow can start on a dry slope after only a few minutes of intense rain.

Debris flows are dangerous because they are fast and unpredictable — faster than someone can run — and can happen in a place when one has never happened before. For instance, one could begin in a stream, and then spread to a neighborhood.

“Pay attention to weather forecasts for the burn area, which could be very different from where you are. It can be pouring in the mountains while sunny or drizzly in your neighborhood,” said NWS.

Warning signs that a debris flow is about to arrive include rushing water, mud and unusual sounds.

“Survivors describe sounds of cracking, breaking, roaring, or a freight train,” according to NWS.

NWS said the primary area of concern is from the Bolt Creek Fire because of its proximity to U.S. 2 and towns in the vicinity of the fire.

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HEADLINE	10/20 Ukraine hit with widespread power outages
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/russia-ukraine-war-power-outages-attacks-infrastructure-kamikaze-drone-rcna53102
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine faced widespread power outages Thursday as the country’s energy system struggled to cope with the damage from a wave of Russian attacks.</p> <p>Civilians across the country were warned to brace for planned power cuts of up to four hours at a time as Ukraine’s national energy company, Ukrenergo, urged people to charge all their devices and stock up on warm socks, blankets and flashlights.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin’s forces have launched intensified missile strikes and “kamikaze” drone attacks against critical infrastructure, in what Ukrainian officials and Western military analysts say is a deliberate new strategy by the Kremlin ahead of winter.</p> <p>From Kharkiv in the east to Lviv in the west, Russian attacks have damaged or destroyed facilities across the country that have supplied power, heat and water throughout the war. Officials pleaded with people to conserve electricity as crews tried to keep up with the repairs.</p> <p>In just over a week, Moscow’s military took out as much as 30% of the country’s power stations, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said. Kyiv has accused Russia of seeking to annihilate the country’s energy system as colder weather sets in because the Kremlin’s military is facing a litany of setbacks on the battlefield.</p>

“We assume that Russian terror will be directed at energy facilities until, with the help of partners, we ensure the ability to shoot down 100% of enemy missiles and drones,” Zelenskyy said in a [video address](#) Wednesday.

Ukraine’s energy minister, Herman Halushchenko, said Thursday the government was seeking a 20% reduction in energy use and that Ukrainians had responded to the appeal to ease pressure on the country’s grid.

‘Anger more than fear’

People in the country’s capital, Kyiv, told NBC News they had been preparing for shortages by stocking up on candles, portable chargers, diesel generators, gas stoves and even thermal underwear and electric blankets.

Iryna Veremenko, who lives in an apartment in Kyiv, said she prepared for the possible blackouts on Thursday by charging all her devices the night before and setting aside food that’s easy to reheat.

Veremenko, 38, said she turned off all her appliances and was relying on her apartment’s gas supply to cook or heat water if necessary.

“I feel anger more than fear,” Veremenko said, adding that the strikes on Ukraine’s energy systems show Moscow’s desperation, which she said is all the more reason for Ukraine to resist.

The business analyst said she had been preparing for temporary shutdowns by stocking up on canned foods, keeping her portable charger ready at all times, and having a travel-size gas burner on the ready. She also has a sleeping bag designed for below freezing temperatures, a thermal blanket and even skiing clothes in case temperatures continue dropping and the strikes on energy targets continue.

The mercury in the Ukrainian capital over the next week are unlikely to rise above 50 degrees Fahrenheit, current forecasts show.

Yuriy Kamelchuk, a Ukrainian lawmaker and member of the parliamentary energy committee, told NBC News that Ukrainians were adapting and even if the power outages become regular, “we know what we are enduring it for.”

“This is all for the sake of true independence and freedom from a crazy neighbor,” Kamelchuk said.

Yana Balatsko, who lives with her husband and three dogs in a private house in the city of Chernivtsi in western Ukraine, said by phone Thursday that she was also heeding the government warnings and had minimized the use of all electronics and appliances.

Should the blackouts continue, Balatsko, 34, said they have a diesel generator and a supply of wood to keep the house warm. They also still have candles and power banks that they stocked up on in the earlier days of the war, she said.

While feeling prepared, Balatsko, who works in IT, said the situation was taking a toll.

“I feel depressed one day and ready to fight the next day,” Balatsko said. “I am angry, I am fed up with the war, but we should stand to the end. ... We will win, I have no doubt. Current restrictions are worth it.”

For months, the Kremlin said it was only after military targets — not civilian or critical infrastructure in Ukraine. But since the [attack on a key bridge](#) in the annexed Crimean Peninsula dealt Putin a strategic and [symbolic blow](#), the Russian Defense Ministry has been open about striking energy targets within Ukraine.

Reports on the damage and the consequent blackouts affecting regular Ukrainians have figured prominently in state media news broadcasts.

A 'very dangerous strategy'

Western and Ukrainian analysts say it signals the Kremlin's new approach, demoralizing both Ukraine and its allies by attempting to fuel a humanitarian crisis.

"This is a new strategy, and a very dangerous one," Volodymyr Fesenko, a Kyiv-based political analyst and the head of the Ukrainian think tank Penta, told NBC News.

It's aimed primarily at "demoralizing" the Ukrainian public, Fesenko said, but also weakening Ukraine's overall defense capability and the resolve of Ukraine's Western partners — betting that people faced with long-term energy outages will flee their towns and villages in a new wave of mass migration on a continent already strained by its own [energy crisis](#) stoked by the conflict.

The British Defense Ministry also said in an assessment this week that causing widespread damage to Ukraine's energy network is likely the "key objective" of the Kremlin's strike campaign.

"As Russia has suffered battlefield setbacks since August, it has highly likely gained a greater willingness to strike civilian infrastructure in addition to Ukrainian military targets," the ministry said in its [analysis](#).

Fesenko said it's clear the majority of Ukrainians have responded with resilience and patience, adapting to rolling blackouts and preparing for a difficult winter ahead.

"This only increases the hatred for Putin and the Russian invaders," Fesenko said, adding that while the shortages may not break Ukrainians' fighting spirit, they could increase some people's openness to a peace deal, even a bad one — something Ukrainian officials said they are not considering right now.

"The winter will show how people really feel," he said. The Kremlin is making sure it's a cold and dark one.

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HEADLINE	10/20 US: Iran troops 'directly engaged' in Crimea
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iranian-troops-ukraine-crimea-russia-drone-strikes/
GIST	<p><i>Washington</i> — The White House said Thursday that the U.S. has evidence that Iranian troops are "directly engaged on the ground" in Crimea supporting Russian drone attacks on Ukraine's infrastructure and civilian population.</p> <p>National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters that Iran has sent a "relatively small number" of personnel to Crimea, a part of Ukraine unilaterally annexed by Russia in contravention of international law in 2014, to assist Russian troops in launching Iranian-made drones against Ukraine.</p> <p>Members of a branch of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps were dispatched to assist Russian forces on how to use the drones, according to a British government statement.</p> <p>"The information we have is that the Iranians have put trainers and tech support in Crimea, but it's the Russians who are doing the piloting," Kirby said.</p> <p>He added that the Biden administration was looking at imposing new sanctions on Tehran and would look for ways to make it harder for Tehran to sell such weapons to Russia.</p> <p>The U.S. first revealed this summer that Russia was purchasing Iranian unmanned aerial vehicles to launch against Ukraine. In a contentious closed-door U.N. Security Council meeting late Wednesday, the U.S., U.K. and France accused Iran of selling drones to Russia in violation of a U.N. Security Council ban against their transfer. Iran and Russia both denied the sale of the munitions.</p>

U.S. officials believe that Iran may have deployed military personnel to assist the Russians in part because of the Russian's lack of familiarity with the Iran-made drones. Declassified U.S. intelligence findings showed that Russians faced technical problems with the Iranian drones soon after taking delivery of the weapons in August.

"The systems themselves were suffering failures and not performing to the standards that apparently the customers expected," Kirby said. "So the Iranians decided to move in some trainers and some technical support to help the Russians use them with with better lethality."

The Biden administration released further details about Iran's involvement in assisting Russia's war in Ukraine at a sensitive moment. The administration has levied [new sanctions](#) against Iran over the government's brutal crackdown on antigovernment protests in recent weeks spurred by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who died in Iranian security custody.

Morality police had detained Amini last month for not properly covering her hair with the Islamic headscarf, known as the hijab, which is mandatory for Iranian women. Amini collapsed at a police station and died three days later.

Her death and the subsequent unrest have come as the administration tries to bring Iran back into compliance with the nuclear deal that was brokered by the Obama administration and scrapped by the Trump administration.

But Kirby said that the administration has little hope for reviving the Iran nuclear deal soon.

"We're not focused on the on the diplomacy at this point," Kirby said. "What we are focused on is making sure that we're holding the regime accountable for the way they're treating peaceful protesters in their country and supporting those protesters."

The White House spoke out about Iranian assistance to Russia as Britain on Thursday announced new sanctions on Iranian officials and businesses as the Russians use the drones to bombard civilian infrastructure.

"These cowardly drone strikes are an act of desperation," British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said in a statement. "By enabling these strikes, these individuals and a manufacturer have caused the people of Ukraine untold suffering. We will ensure that they are held to account for their actions."

Among the individuals hit with asset freezes and travel bans by the British were Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, chairman of the armed forces general staff overseeing the army branches supplying Russia with drones; Brigadier General Seyed Hojjatollah Qureishi, a key Iranian negotiator in the deal;. and Brigadier General Saeed Aghajani, the head the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Aerospace Force UAV Command.

Shahed Aviation Industries, the Iranian manufacturer of the drones being used by Russia, was also hit by an asset freeze.

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HEADLINE	10/20 Soaring mortgage rates likely to keep rising
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/latest-mortgage-rates-freddie-mac-2023-10-20/
GIST	<p>Average long-term U.S. mortgage rates inched up this week ahead of another expected rate increase by the Federal Reserve when it meets early next month.</p> <p>Mortgage buyer Freddie Mac reported Thursday that the average on the key 30-year rate ticked up this week to 6.94% from 6.92% last week. Last year at this time, the rate was 3.09%.</p>

"The 30-year fixed-rate mortgage continues to remain just shy of 7% and is adversely impacting the housing market in the form of declining demand," Freddie Mac Chief Economist Sam Khater said in a statement. "Additionally, homebuilder confidence has dropped to half what it was just six months ago and construction, particularly single-family residential construction, continues to slow down."

The average rate on 15-year, fixed-rate mortgages, popular among those looking to refinance their homes, jumped to 6.23% from 6.09% last week. Last week it climbed over 6% for the first time since the housing market crash of 2008. One year ago, the 15-year rate was 2.33%.

Late in September, the Federal Reserve bumped its benchmark borrowing rate by another three-quarters of a point in an effort to constrain the economy and tame inflation. It was the Fed's fifth increase this year and third consecutive 0.75 percentage point increase. The Fed's next two-day policy meeting opens Nov. 1, with most economists expecting another big three-quarters of a point hike.

Despite the Fed's swift and heavy rate increases, inflation has hardly budged from 40-year highs and the labor market remains tight.

Many prospective buyers have been pushed out of the market as average mortgage rates have more than doubled this year, while home prices remain steep and properties are in short supply. Sales of previously occupied U.S. homes fell in September for the eighth month in a row, matching the pre-pandemic sales pace from 10 years ago.

The National Association of Realtors said Thursday that existing home sales fell 1.5% last month from August to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.71 million. That's slightly higher than what economists were expecting, according to FactSet.

"The surge in mortgage rates to nearly 7% over the past few weeks has triggered a further drop in mortgage demand, and we expect home sales to keep falling until early next year," Ian Shepherdson, chief economist with Pantheon Macroeconomics, said in a report.

Many analysts expect mortgage rates to keep climbing. Whalen Global Advisors forecasts rates to double-digits by April of 2023 and for home prices to sink.

"If you're planning to move home and will need a new mortgage, you will face a huge increase in rates," Shepherdson said.

Around the U.S., the typical home value fell 0.3% from July to August and 0.1% from June to July, [Zillow said in a report last month](#). That was the largest monthly decrease since 2011.

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HEADLINE	10/20 Feds alerted to AZ drop box surveillance
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/doj-alerted-to-creepy-surveillance-attempt-at-maricopa-county-arizona-drop-box?ref=home
GIST	<p>Allegations of possible voter intimidation in a highly politicized Arizona county have been sent to state and federal law enforcement authorities for potential prosecution, The Daily Beast has confirmed.</p> <p>In an email, Sophia Solis, a spokeswoman for Arizona Secretary of State Katie Hobbs, said Thursday that Hobbs' office "has referred to the DOJ and AG a report from a voter that the voter was approached and followed by a group of individuals when the voter was trying to drop off their ballot at an early voting drop box on Monday."</p> <p>"The location was at the Juvenile Justice Court drop box location in Maricopa County," the email added. "The SOS has talked to the voter, informed Maricopa County, and referred the report to the DOJ and AG's offices for further investigation."</p>

The voter, whose name [is redacted in a copy of the complaint Solis shared with The Daily Beast](#), submitted an online complaint on Oct. 17 at 7:28 p.m., saying the alleged incident had taken place roughly 50 minutes earlier.

“There’s a group of people hanging out near the ballot dropbox filming and photographing my wife and I as we approached the dropbox and accusing us of being a mule,” the complaint stated. “They took a photograph of our license plate and of us and then followed us out the parking lot in one of their cars continuing to film.”

Meanwhile, the QAnon-linked founder of an organization recently seen staking out drop boxes in Maricopa is distancing herself from the suspect, claiming she doesn’t “know who he is.”

Early voting for the 2022 midterm elections [is underway in Arizona](#), where ballot drop boxes have been in use since 2020, when they were introduced by 40 U.S. states as a way to help people vote safely for president as the COVID pandemic raged. There have been no reported cases of fraud, vandalism, or anything else that could have affected the outcome of the election that elevated Joe Biden to the Oval Office two years ago, [according to an Associated Press survey of state election officials](#) on both sides of the aisle.

However, the right-wing continues to allege widespread election fraud due to drop boxes, a debunked claim first floated publicly by former President Donald Trump and amplified by people like conservative firebrand Dinesh D’Souza, whose discredited documentary *2,000 Mules* put forth bogus claims that Democratic operatives had stuffed unmonitored ballot boxes with phony votes.

Since then, conservative extremist groups—as well as [Trump-endorsed politicians running for elected office](#)—have called on members and supporters to stake out drop boxes around the country, with Arizona having become a particular hotspot. Officials have raised concerns about the potential for voter intimidation, as box-watchers fan out nationwide.

Last Saturday, Clean Elections USA founder Melody Jennings, a minister who has namechecked QAnon during appearances on indicted Trump adviser Steve Bannon’s webcast, said she had volunteers “ready to go” not just in Arizona, but in 17 other states, as well.

“We’ve got people out there, on the ground and doing the work,” [Jennings told Bannon](#), explaining that her “people” were stationed “around the box with iPhones, with, you know, Androids, with your own cameras, which is legal, by the way, we can video and we can take pictures.”

Clean Elections USA began watching drop boxes during the primaries this past summer, which Jennings, who goes by “TrumperMel” online, trumpeted on Truth Social, the floundering social network Trump backed after being banned from Twitter. This served as a sort of “[dry run](#)” for the midterms, Jennings said.

Jennings, in social media posts, has asked for “10 people in groups around every drop box! Not 2 people. That’s not a deterrent. Bring lights, food, lawn chairs, play cards, (no music) Video, take pics. Don’t talk to them. Abide by the laws.”

On Monday, Jennings took to Truth Social with an urgent request.

“All Arizona patriots get to either the Mesa box or the Phoenix box ...the only 2 that are outdoors... Right now,” she wrote. “There are mules getting there and doing their thing even with my people there.”

The next evening, Jennings posted a blurry photo of what she claimed was a “mule” caught in the act at a drop box in Mesa, which is part of Maricopa County.

“This guy. Drove in backwards to avoid plate detection,” she alleged. Got out showing his back. Pulled ballots out of his shirt. I need people there tonight to help my people. Lots of you!”

But Jennings insists that the drop box-watcher referred by Katie Hobbs to law enforcement authorities has nothing to do with her.

“The individual they speak of is not associated with Clean Elections USA in any way,” Jennings told The Daily Beast on Thursday. “Never was a member of Clean Elections USA. I don’t know who he is.”

Other drop box-watching groups in Arizona have reportedly changed their minds about the idea, such as the Lions of Liberty, a self-described “resolute nucleus of concerned, passionate conservative patriots who are determined to correct the course of our country which has been hijacked and undermined by global elites, communists, leftists, deep state bureaucrats, and fake news.”

They had dozens of observers in Yavapai County ready to mobilize last week for their “Operation Drop Box” initiative, but reportedly called things off after receiving a cease and desist letter from the nonprofit Protect Democracy, which alleged voter intimidation.

“We’re moving forward with it, in name and slight practice,” Lions of Liberty leader Luke Cilano [told 3TV/CBS 5](#). “When I’m out and about driving around, I swing by and watch a box from a distance.”

Reports of potential voter intimidation by drop box-watchers in Arizona were first brought up at an Oct. 13 news conference [by Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer](#). There are cameras monitoring Maricopa’s two drop boxes, according to Richer, who did not identify the offending group by name.

“Any attempt to deter, intimidate a lawful voter is unlawful, should be immediately reported, please to us, but also law enforcement,” Richer said.

Richer, a Republican, has received death threats for not going along with Donald Trump’s “Big Lie.” In August, [a Missouri public school employee was indicted on federal charges](#) for telling Richer in a 2021 voicemail, in part, “You need to do your fucking job right because other people from other states are watching your ass. You **** renege on this deal or give them any more troubles, your ass will never make it to your next little board meeting.”

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HEADLINE	10/20 Covid-19 linked to pregnancy-related deaths
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/covid-19-linked-increase-us-pregnancy-related-deaths-91758935
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON -- COVID-19 drove a dramatic increase in the number of women who died from pregnancy or childbirth complications in the U.S. last year, a crisis that has disproportionately claimed Black and Hispanic women as victims, according to a government report released Wednesday.</p> <p>The report lays out grim trends across the country for expectant mothers and their newborn babies.</p> <p>It finds that pregnancy-related deaths have spiked nearly 80% since 2018, with COVID-19 being a factor in a quarter of the 1,178 deaths reported last year. The percentage of preterm and low birthweight babies also went up last year, after holding steady for years. And more pregnant or postpartum women are reporting symptoms of depression.</p> <p>“We were already in the middle of a crisis with maternal mortality in our country,” said Karen Tabb Dina, a maternal health researcher at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. “This really shows that COVID-19 has exacerbated that crisis to rates that we, as a country, are not able to handle.”</p> <p>The nonpartisan U.S. Government Accountability Office, which authored the report, analyzed pregnancy-related deaths after Congress mandated that it review maternal health outcomes in the 2020 coronavirus relief bill.</p>

The maternal death rate in the U.S. is higher than many other developed nations and had been on the rise in the years leading up to the pandemic, but COVID-19 has only worsened conditions here for pregnant women.

Women who contract the virus while pregnant face elevated health risks. Staffing shortages and COVID-19 restrictions created more hurdles for expecting mothers to get in-person health care; And pandemic stress has intensified depression, a common condition during pregnancy.

Mental health issues likely contributed to the increase in pregnancy-related deaths, Tabb Dina said. Many women who experience depression and anxiety during or after their pregnancy struggle to get the care they need.

“Mental health is the greatest complication in pregnancy that we don't understand,” she said.

The biggest spike in deaths came during July through December of last year, as the COVID-19 delta variant infected millions, noted Carolyn Yocom, a director at the Government Accountability Office.

“It’s really clear from the data that the time in which the delta variant spread seemed to correspond to a huge increase in deaths,” Yocom said.

The maternal death rate is particularly stark for Black women, who have long faced worse maternal outcomes than their peers.

Pregnancy-related deaths for every 100,000 births climbed from 44 in 2019 to 68.9 among Black women last year. White women had death rates of 26.1 last year, a jump from 17.9 in 2019.

Death rates among Hispanics had been on the decline, but they swelled again during the pandemic from 12.6 per 100,000 in 2019 to 27.5 last year.

Black and Hispanic people have also died at higher rates from COVID-19, in part because they have less access to medical care and often work essential jobs that exposed them to the virus.

Long before COVID-19 began spreading, the stage was set for Black, low-income and rural women to receive subpar pregnancy care -- putting them at further risk for their pregnancies to go wrong, according to a separate GAO report.

Hospitals have been shedding their obstetric services in rural areas, low-income and majority Black communities, that report said.

More than half of rural counties didn’t have a hospital offering pregnancy care as of 2018, the review found.

“The loss of hospital-based obstetric services in rural areas is associated with increases in out-of-hospital births and pre-term births, which may contribute to poor maternal and infant outcomes,” the report found.

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HEADLINE	10/20 WHO: Covid-19 vax rates drop 50% in Africa
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/covid-19-vaccination-rates-dropped-50-africa-91788588
GIST	DAKAR, Senegal -- The number of COVID-19 vaccine doses given in Africa has dropped by more than 50% over the last three months, the World Health Organization said Thursday, even though less than a quarter of all Africans have been vaccinated.

Despite increased availability of vaccines on the continent, Africa still lags far behind the global average, with only 24% of the population having completed their primary series of COVID-19 vaccination compared to 64% worldwide.

“The end of the COVID-19 pandemic is within sight, but as long as Africa lags far behind the rest of the world in reaching widespread protection, there is a dangerous gap which the virus can exploit to come roaring back,” said Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO regional director for Africa.

Only three African countries — Liberia, Mauritius and Seychelles — have vaccinated more than 70% of their population. Rwanda is expected to reach the benchmark soon, and four others also have hit 50%, the WHO said Thursday.

Once COVID-19 vaccines became available in 2021, Western countries hoarded available supplies, leaving many African countries last in line to receive doses. Some African countries also said that the doses donated by Western countries were sent too close to their expiration dates to be fully utilized.

Africa now has adequate vaccines available, Moeti said Thursday. But as case numbers have fallen, so too has interest in being vaccinated. Only 4,281 new cases were reported on the continent last week — about 1.3% of Africa's peak during December 2021, the WHO said.

“Unfortunately, as vaccines have helped avert serious COVID-19 illness, hospitalization and death, people are less fearful and also less willing to get vaccinated,” Moeti said.

Still, notable progress has been made, according to Aurelia Nguyen, special adviser with GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance. At the beginning of the year, there were 28 countries in Africa where vaccination rates were below 10%.

“And since the beginning of the year, 22 countries have moved past this milestone,” Nguyen said. “We’ve got Burkina Faso and Malawi that have become the latest countries to do so. We have Mali that is set to cross the milestone of more than 10% coverage in the coming weeks.”

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HEADLINE	10/20 Indonesia: contaminated medicines kill 99
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/indonesia-contaminated-medicines-linked-99-deaths-91790682
GIST	<p>JAKARTA, Indonesia -- Indonesia has found contaminated medicines that are suspected of being linked to the deaths of 99 children this year due to acute kidney injury, officials said Thursday.</p> <p>Indonesia’s Food and Drug Monitoring Agency said it was tracing 26 medicinal syrups used to treat fevers, coughs and colds, noting that testing showed five such medicines had ethylene glycol levels “that exceeded the safe threshold,” it said in a statement.</p> <p>The Health Ministry, which banned all syrup medicines on Wednesday, is working with the food and drug agency to determine which other drugs to potentially withdraw as a preventive measure, Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin said.</p> <p>There have been 206 cases of acute kidney injury in children reported from 20 provinces in Indonesia this year, and a death rate of 48%, the Health Ministry said Wednesday.</p> <p>“Previously, there were only a few cases of kidney injuries, only one or two every month. But at the end of August there was a spike in cases that got our attention. It is an atypical progressive acute kidney injury. We call it atypical as the cause is still under investigation or unknown,” said Mohammad Syahril, a spokesperson from the Health Ministry.</p> <p>However, the agency cautioned that other risk factors can also cause acute kidney injury.</p>

	<p>The Food and Drug Monitoring Agency, together with the Ministry of Health, pharmaceutical experts, clinical pharmacology experts, the Indonesian Pediatrician Association and other related groups are exploring other risk factors.</p> <p>Syahril said there is no evidence of any link between the kidney injuries in these cases and the COVID-19 vaccine or virus infection.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Uganda Ebola outbreak 'rapidly evolving'
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/uganda-ebola-outbreak-rapidly-evolving-month-91788643
GIST	<p>KAMPALA, Uganda -- Uganda's Ebola outbreak is "rapidly evolving" a month after the disease was reported in the East African country, a top World Health Organization official said Thursday, describing a difficult situation for health workers.</p> <p>"The Ministry of Health of Uganda has shown remarkable resilience and effectiveness and (is) constantly fine-tuning a response to what is a challenging situation," Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the U.N. health agency's regional director for Africa, told reporters. "A better understanding of the chains of transmission is helping those on the ground respond more effectively."</p> <p>Uganda declared an outbreak of Ebola on Sept. 20, several days after the contagious disease began spreading in a rural farming community. Ebola has since infected 64 people and killed 24, although official figures do not include people who likely died of Ebola before the outbreak was confirmed.</p> <p>At least three of the confirmed patients traveled from the virus hot spot in central Uganda to the capital, Kampala, about 150 kilometers (93 miles) away, according to Moeti. Fears that Ebola could spread far from the outbreak's epicenter caused authorities to impose a lockdown, including nighttime curfews, on two of the five districts reporting Ebola cases.</p> <p>Ebola "numbers that we are seeing do pose a risk for spread within the country and its neighbors," Dr. Ahmed Ogwell, the acting head of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said in a separate briefing Thursday.</p> <p>While the risk of cross-border contamination is there, "it's a manageable risk," Ogwell said, adding that the outbreak does not yet necessitate going into what he called "full emergency mode."</p> <p>There is no proven vaccine for the Sudan strain of Ebola that's circulating in Uganda. A WHO official in Uganda told the AP Wednesday that plans are underway to deploy two experimental vaccines in a study targeting health workers and contacts of Ebola patients.</p> <p>Ugandan officials have documented more than 1,800 Ebola contacts, 747 of whom have completed 21 days of monitoring for possible signs of the disease that manifests as a viral hemorrhagic fever, Ogwell said.</p> <p>Ebola is spread by contact with bodily fluids of an infected person or contaminated materials. Symptoms include fever, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle pain and, at times, internal and external bleeding.</p> <p>Scientists don't know the natural reservoir of Ebola, but they suspect the first person infected in an outbreak acquired the virus through contact with an infected animal or eating its raw meat. Ugandan officials are still investigating the source of the current outbreak.</p> <p>Uganda has had multiple Ebola outbreaks, including one in 2000 that killed more than 200 people. The 2014-16 Ebola outbreak in West Africa killed more than 11,000 people, the disease's largest death toll.</p> <p>Ebola was discovered in 1976 in two simultaneous outbreaks in South Sudan and Congo, where it occurred in a village near the Ebola River, after which the disease is named.</p>

HEADLINE	10/20 Chad security fires on protesters, kill 30
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/30-killed-amid-demonstrations-chads-capital-91816154
GIST	<p>N'DJAMENA, Chad -- Chadian security forces opened fire on anti-government demonstrators in the country's two largest cities Thursday killing at least 60 people, the government spokesman and a morgue official said.</p> <p>Authorities imposed a curfew after the violence, which came amid demonstrations in the central African nation against interim leader Mahamat Idriss Deby's two-year extension of his power.</p> <p>Thursday's unrest was unprecedented in Chad, which saw little public dissent during the previous regime of Deby's father, who ruled for more than three decades until his assassination last year.</p> <p>France, the African Union and others swiftly condemned the security crackdown on the demonstrators.</p> <p>Samira Daoud, Amnesty International's regional director for West and Central Africa, called on the Chadian authorities "to immediately cease the excessive use of force against protesters."</p> <p>"The authorities must take immediate steps to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for unlawful killings," she said.</p> <p>Chadian government spokesman Aziz Mahamat Saleh said 30 people were dead in the capital, N'Djamena. Organizers of the march, though, placed the toll higher, at 40, with many wounded by bullets as well. There was no independent corroboration of the figures given by the two sides..</p> <p>Another 32 protesters were killed in Chad's second-largest city, Moundou, according to an official in the city's morgue. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, said more than 60 people were wounded.</p> <p>Other protests were held in the southern Chadian towns of Doba and Sarh.</p> <p>These were the deadliest anti-government protests since Deby took over in the wake of his father's assassination 18 months ago. Officials said the late President Idriss Deby Itno was killed by rebels while visiting Chadian troops on the battlefield in the country's north in April 2021.</p> <p>At the main reference hospital in the capital N'Djamena, overwhelmed doctors tended to scores of people with gunshot wounds. Some of the wounded were taken to Liberty Hospital by army vehicles and bore signs of having been tortured, witnesses said.</p> <p>Witnesses say demonstrators began to blow whistles at 3 a.m. all over the capital of N'Djamena. Police fired tear gas at the crowds, which continued advancing and their numbers grew. It was then that security forces opened fire, leaving protesters struggling to gather the dead from the scene amid the tear gas.</p> <p>Among those killed was a Chadian journalist, Narcisse Oredje, who worked for CEFOD radio and was struck by a bullet.</p> <p>Amnesty International said it was not the first time that Chadian security forces have fired on civilians, citing two other incidents in 2022 and 2021.</p> <p>Such public displays of dissent were unheard of during the rule of Deby's father, but several demonstrations have been held since his son became interim leader.</p> <p>Mahamat Idriss Deby was declared the head of state after his father's death instead of following the Chadian constitution's line of succession. Opposition political parties at the time called the handover a coup d'etat, but later agreed to accept Deby as interim leader for 18 months.</p>

HEADLINE	10/20 Russia, Ukraine forces gird for major battle
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/russia-seeks-regain-ground-hits-ukrains-power-plants-91788544
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- Russian and Ukrainian troops appeared Thursday to be girding for a major battle over the strategic southern industrial port city of Kherson, in a region which Russian President Vladimir Putin has illegally annexed and subjected to martial law.</p> <p>Fighting and evacuations were reported in the Kherson region as Moscow tried to pound the invaded country into submission with more missile and drone attacks on critical infrastructure.</p> <p>Putin declared martial law in the Kherson, Luhansk, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions on Wednesday in an attempt to assert Russian authority in the annexed areas as he faced battlefield setbacks, a troubled troop mobilization, increasing criticism at home and abroad, and international sanctions.</p> <p>The unsettled status of the illegally absorbed territory was especially visible in the Kherson region's capital, where Russian military officials have replaced Kremlin-installed civilian leaders as part of martial law that took effect Thursday to defend against a Ukrainian counteroffensive.</p> <p>Kherson city, with a prewar population of about 284,000, was one of the first urban areas Russia captured when it invaded Ukraine, and it remains the largest city it holds. It is a prime target for both sides because of its key industries and major river port. Reports of sabotage and assassinations of Russian-installed officials in Kherson have surfaced for months, in what appeared to be one of the most active Ukrainian resistance movements in occupied territory.</p> <p>Russian-installed officials have urged residents to evacuate for their safety and to allow the military to build fortifications. Officials said 15,000 residents of an expected 60,000 had been relocated from the city and surrounding areas as of Thursday.</p> <p>President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office said Thursday that Ukrainian forces mounted 15 attacks on Russian military strongholds in the Kherson region. For its part, Russia's Defense Ministry spokesman said the Kremlin's forces repelled Ukrainian attempts to advance with tanks on the Kherson villages of Sukhanove, Nova Kamianka and Chervonyi Yar.</p> <p>A Russian-installed official in the region, Vladimir Leontyev, said Thursday Ukrainian forces had launched five missile strikes against the Kakhovka dam and hydroelectric power station about 70 kms (44 miles) from Kherson city. He said on Russian TV that if the facilities were destroyed, a critical canal providing water to annexed Crimea would be cut off.</p> <p>Zelenskyy countered that the Russians have mined the dam and power station, with plans to blow them up in what he called a terrorism act to unleash 18 million cubic meters (4.8 billion gallons) and flood Kherson and dozens of areas where hundreds of thousands of people live. He told the European Council Russia would then blame Ukraine.</p> <p>None of the claims could be independently verified.</p> <p>Russia's new military commander in Ukraine this week acknowledged the threat posed by Ukraine's counteroffensive to Kherson, and Britain's Defense Ministry interpreted that Thursday to mean, "Russian authorities are seriously considering a major withdrawal of their forces from the area west of the Dnieper River."</p> <p>Putin tried Thursday to address another problem area, the partial mobilization of reservists he ordered last month and estimated it would end by the end of this month by reaching its 300,000-man target. He visited a training center in the Russian region of Ryazan to show progress in rectifying problems with training and</p>

supplies for newly mobilized troops. Russian TV showed him lying under a net on a field, wearing goggles and ear protection, and shooting a rifle. A military officer showed Putin and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu soldiers wearing bulletproof vests and helmets, with weapons. The officer displayed winter boots, clothes, cooking utensils and other supplies — all to counter images Russians have posted on social media of shabby or non-existent gear for newly mobilized troops.

In another sign of Russia's wavering mobilization, Ukrainian authorities said more than 3,000 Russians have called a hotline for soldiers who don't want to take part in the war and are asking to surrender.

In other developments:

—Russian forces attacked Ukrainian positions near Bilohorivka, a village in eastern Ukraine's Luhansk region. In the neighboring Donetsk region, fighting raged near the city of Bakhmut. Kremlin-backed separatists have controlled parts of both regions for 8½ years.

—Russia continued attacking energy infrastructure, dispatching drones and missiles to eight regions, prompting authorities to ask residents to reduce energy consumption from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and to dim city street lights. They warned of rolling blackouts continuing Friday. In Kryvyi Rih, Russian strikes damaged a power plant and another energy facility, cutting electricity to the central Ukraine city of about 600,000 residents. Kryvyi Rih is home to metallurgical factories key to Ukraine's economy. Gov. Valentin Reznichenko said the city sustained serious damage.

—Ukrainian authorities said missile and drone strikes started fires in the southern city of Mykolaiv, with four drones hitting a school. Another school in Komyshevakha, a village in Zaporizhzhia, also took four drone strikes.

—The Ukrainian army's general staff reported a heightened chance that Russian forces could attack from Belarus to cut supply routes for Western weapons and equipment. Oleksei Hromov, a general staff official, said Russia was deploying aircraft and troops in Belarus.

—The White House said Iranian troops are “directly engaged on the ground” in Crimea supporting Russian drone attacks, troubling evidence of Tehran's deepening role assisting Russia as it exacts suffering on Ukrainian civilians just as the cold weather sets in.

—Despite the Kremlin's — and Iran's — claims to the contrary, a leading Russian military expert unwittingly acknowledged that Iran has supplied Russia with weaponized drones it uses in Ukraine. Ruslan Pukhov, head of the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, a Moscow-based think tank, asked journalists before a TV interview not to question him about where the drones came from, unaware that he was live on air. “We all know that they are Iranian-made, but authorities haven't acknowledged that,” Pukhov said.

—The EU on Thursday imposed sanctions on Iran's Shahed Aviation Industries, as well as three Iranian armed forces generals, for undermining Ukraine's territorial integrity by helping to supply Russia with drones.

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HEADLINE	10/20 Sudan: tribal clashes in south kill 170
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/tribal-clashes-killed-19-southern-sudan-province-91799739
GIST	<p>CAIRO -- Tribal clashes in Sudan's southern province of Blue Nile have killed at least 170 people over the past two days, two Sudanese officials said Thursday, the latest in inter-communal violence across the country's neglected south.</p> <p>The officials, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media, said the clashes erupted on Wednesday and that sporadic fighting</p>

continues. Government troops were deployed to the area to try to de-escalate the conflict. The dead include women and children, the two officials said.

Blue Nile has been shaken by ethnic violence over the past months. Tribal clashes that erupted in July killed 149 people by early October, and last week, renewed clashes killed another 13 people, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA.

The July fighting involved the Hausa, a tribe with origins across West Africa, and the Berta people, following a land dispute. On Thursday, a group representing the Hausa said they have been under attack by individuals armed with heavy weapons over the past two days, but did not blame any specific tribe or group for the attack.

A Hausa group issued a statement calling for de-escalation and a stop to "the genocide and ethnic cleansing of the Hausa." The tribe has long been marginalized within Sudanese society, with July's violence sparking a string of Hausa protests across the country. The Blue Nile is home to dozens of different ethnic groups, with hate speech and racism often inflaming decades-long tribal tensions.

OCHA had no confirmation of the latest surge in casualties but said the violence has displaced at least 1,200 people since last week. According to the U.N. agency, the villages surrounding the city of Ar Rusyaris have been at the epicenter of the violence.

Later Thursday, a grassroots pro-democracy group in Sudan known as the Resistance Committees blamed the country's military rulers for what it said was a lack of security in the Blue Nile, accusing them of not protecting ethnic groups in the province.

Earlier in the day, OCHA said that tribal clashes in nearby West Kordofan province, which broke out last week, killed 19 people and wounded dozens. A gunfight there between the Misseriya and Nuba ethnic groups erupted amid a land dispute near the town of Al Lagowa, the agency said.

The West Kordofan state governor visited the town on Tuesday to talk to local residents in a bid to de-escalate the conflict before coming under artillery fire from a nearby mountainous area, OCHA said. There were no reports of casualties from the artillery fire.

"Fighting in West Kordofan and the Blue Nile states risks further displacements and human suffering," OCHA said. "There is also a risk of an escalation and spread of the fighting with additional humanitarian consequences," it said.

On Wednesday, the Sudanese army accused the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North, a rebel group active in the Blue Nile and South Kordofan, of being behind the attack on Al Lagowa. The rebel group has not responded to the accusation.

The violence in West Kordofan prompted around 36,500 people to flee Al Lagowa while many who remained sought shelter in the town's army base, OCHA added. The area is currently inaccessible to humanitarian aid, the agency said.

Eisa El Dakar, a local journalist from West Kordofan, told The AP last week that the conflict there is partly rooted in the two ethnic groups' conflicting claims to local land, with the Misseriya being predominately a herding community and the Nuba mostly farmers.

Much of Kordofan and other areas in southern Sudan have been rocked by chaos and conflict over the past decade.

Sudan has been plugged into turmoil since a coup last October that upended the country's brief democratic transition after three decades of autocratic rule by Omar al-Bashir. He was toppled in an April 2019 popular uprising, paving the way for a civilian-military power-sharing government.

	Many analysts consider the rising violence a product of the power vacuum in the region, caused by the military coup last October. The violence has also further threatened Sudan's already struggling economy, compounded by fuel shortages caused, in part, by the war in Ukraine.
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HEADLINE	10/20 Child care industry faces workers shortage
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/child-care-industry-struggles-shortage-workers-unheard/story?id=91701041
GIST	<p>Marcelo Candia spends all day teaching a classroom full of 4-year-old children in northern Virginia -- then walks across the street to work in a grocery store bakery for four more hours.</p> <p>It's the reality faced by so many workers in the child care industry, where low pay and other factors have created a labor crisis exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>"I love what I do," Candia, a father who is also working toward an associate's degree, told ABC News. "I come here with a lot of energy. I go out of the school when I'm finished my period here with a boost of energy."</p> <p>As the U.S. job market continues to bounce back from the coronavirus pandemic, the child care industry has lagged behind.</p> <p>The sector has lost about 9.7% of its workforce compared to pre-pandemic levels, or about 102,400 employees between February 2020 and last month, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.</p> <p>'This is unheard of'</p> <p>Leslie Spina, who runs five early childhood education centers in Philadelphia, told ABC News she continues to face staffing shortages.</p> <p>"We're about 22% short-staffed right now," Spina, the executive director of Kinder Academy, said. "This is unheard of."</p> <p>At Candia's center, ACCA Child Development Center in Annandale, Virginia, the shortage of workers has meant fewer kids can receive care.</p> <p>"I have a couple of classrooms that are not staffed," Isabel Ballivian, the executive director of ACCA Child Development Center, told ABC News. "Therefore, we don't have children there."</p> <p>Low wages drive staffing shortage, experts say</p> <p>The most significant factor driving the staffing crisis is low pay for child care workers, according to experts.</p> <p>A child care worker in the United States made an average of just \$13.31 per hour, or \$27,680 per year, in 2021, according to the most recent available data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.</p> <p>"It's physically mentally, emotionally hard work, and it's one of the lowest paid jobs in every single state in the country," said Lea Austin, the executive director of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, at the University of California, Berkeley.</p> <p>Many day care teachers want to stay in the industry but cannot afford to provide for their own families, educators and center directors told ABC News.</p> <p>"If I wanted to have kids, if I wanted to get married and kind of go to that next part of my life, it's just not really possible," Nicole Lazarte, who leads an infant classroom at ACCA Child Development Center, said. "I could do it, and I've seen people do it, but I see them struggle."</p> <p>Instead, educators often turn to higher-paying, less stressful jobs in retail and restaurants.</p>

"We're not paying what Target pays," Spina said. "We're not paying what Chick-fil-A pays -- because we can't afford to."

Many teachers are also drawn to publicly funded K-12 schools, which typically offer better wages, vacation time and other benefits. Center directors say that can lead to a brain drain at day cares as more experienced workers leave.

Reliance on tuition from parents prevents wage increases

Unlike public K-12 schools, which are funded by taxpayer dollars, early childhood centers primarily rely on tuition charged to parents to fund their budgets.

They do also often receive some public assistance, but the amount they get varies widely across states and jurisdictions.

But it's not nearly enough for so many centers, many of which closed during the pandemic as enrollment lagged.

"We are not going to solve this problem without public intervention and public funding," Austin said. "It really is the equivalent of trying to fund a public school system through parent fees."

Ballivian, who runs ACCA Child Development Center, said that raising tuition simply is not an option, with many working-class parents struggling to make ends meet themselves.

"The large majority of the children that we serve come from families that have low income and that are relatively new to the community," Ballivian told ABC News. "It is imperative that these kids have access to quality care and education, because it's the one thing that is changing the trajectories of their lives."

Some daycare centers have fought to retain workers by increasing pay and benefits, but limited financial resources makes doing so difficult.

The center receives some funding from the county and state – and got federal dollars during the pandemic – but, Ballivian said, is still facing an approximately \$200,000 deficit for the current fiscal year "because we decided to increase the salaries."

"There are times when you wake up and think, is it worth it? Should I continue to do this?" she said. "But I know that I am making a difference in the lives of others."

DC tries supplementing teachers' incomes

Some jurisdictions, like Washington, D.C., have tried to channel more money to early childhood centers -- and teachers.

The D.C. government, which provides various grants to centers themselves, also launched an innovative program this year that supplements educators' salaries – with payments totalling up to \$14,000 per year.

Payments to teachers are part of an array of funding the city spend on early child care, according to Sara Mead, the city's deputy superintendent of early learning. Residents benefit from free, universal pre-kindergarten; centers receive grants to raise their quality of care; and low-income families receive subsidies to cover child care costs.

Latoria Meyers, who teaches infants and toddlers at Kidspace Child and Family Development Center in Washington, said the additional money from the city has helped her "tremendously."

"I'm a single mom, so it helped me kind of get back on a financial balance, as far as, like, paying some things off, actually taking my son on a trip finally – his first plane ride," Meyers told ABC News.

The center where she works provides free child care to families who have experienced homelessness, trauma and abuse. It relies largely on private donations, as well as funding from the city.

Sandra Jackson, the president and CEO of House of Ruth, the organization that runs the center, told ABC News that paying relatively more has helped retain quality workers.

"It's a no brainer," Jackson said. "The child care workers, teachers, anyone that comes in contact with children is just as important as our doctors, our lawyers, our Supreme Court justices."

Parents feel squeeze

Amid the staffing shortages, parents have felt the squeeze as options for care become more limited.

Courtney Tay, a pre-kindergarten teacher in Springfield, Missouri, has spent months searching for a day care space for a daughter she is expecting in December.

"For most of the centers, they don't have any availability until summer or fall of 2023," she said. "I'm looking for care when she is three months old, and they're not going to have any available until she's about eight or nine months old."

Tay plans to rely on her mother for help until then.

"I've been really surprised by how difficult it is to find a place for her," Tay said.

Federal reform needed to end crisis, experts say

Experts say reform is needed at the federal level to transform the early childhood education system, attracting workers and making care affordable and accessible.

"The reality is state and local governments can't do this on our own," Mead, of the D.C. government, told ABC News. "There are fiscal constraints that we operate under that are different from those of the federal government and so to get really large infusions of funds, it will be necessary to tap the power of federal funds."

President Joe Biden pushed Congress to approve major investments in child care, including funding for free, universal preschool for all three- and four-year-old children nationwide.

But after Republicans in Congress blocked that plan, Biden faced additional resistance from Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin, of West Virginia, and dropped the investments from a later iteration of a domestic spending plan Congress did pass.

Without change, the industry will continue to face job shortages and high rates of staffing turnover, according to Austin, who has studied the U.S. early childhood care system's workforce extensively.

"If we can't figure out how to have reform of our early childhood education system that is driven by public dollars," Austin said, "we're not going to recover from this crisis."

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HEADLINE	10/20 College enrollment falls 3 rd consecutive yr.
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/college-enrollment-drops-3rd-consecutive-year-pandemic-report/story?id=91789963
GIST	<p>College enrollment in the United States fell for the third consecutive year, deepening the woes endured by universities nationwide since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a report released on Thursday showed.</p> <p>However, the pace of the decline in enrollment slowed this autumn, suggesting that the pandemic-induced student exodus has begun to wane, according to data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research</p>

Center. Student enrollment dropped 1.1% this fall, compared with a combined 5.5% decline in 2020 and 2021.

In a key point of concern, the rate of decline in enrollment among freshmen exceeded that of students overall, with implications for universities that could last over the next several years.

The decline in freshmen enrollment befell every category of 4-year institutions, whether public or private, for-profit or non-profit, the data showed.

"After two straight years of historically large losses, it is particularly troubling that numbers are still falling, especially among freshmen," Doug Shapiro, the executive director at the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, said in a statement.

"Although the decline has slowed and there are some bright spots, a path back to pre-pandemic enrollment levels is growing further out of reach," he added.

The decline in enrollment extended beyond undergraduate students, as graduate school enrollment fell 1%, reversing a 2.7% gain last fall. Graduate student enrollment fell in 26 states, according to the report.

While the report delivered sobering news for many institutions of higher education, it offered a sign of optimism for historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

Enrollment at HBCUs grew 2.5% this fall, bouncing back from a decline of 1.7% last year, the data showed. The rise in enrollment owed to a 6.6% increase in freshmen enrolling at HBCUs.

In a sign of shifting educational norms amid the pandemic, undergraduate students enrolled exclusively online grew by 2.5% this autumn.

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HEADLINE	10/20 NOAA: 'triple dip' La Niña impact to winter
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/triple-dip-la-nia-meteorologists-predict-coming/story?id=89414178
GIST	<p>The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on Thursday released its annual U.S. winter outlook and scientists are expecting a "Triple Dip" La Niña pattern.</p> <p>La Nina means cooler-than-normal ocean temperatures in the eastern Pacific Ocean near the equator. This cooler water affects weather patterns in the U.S., especially during the months of December, January and February.</p> <p>NOAA is predicting drier-than-average conditions across the South with wetter-than-average conditions for areas of the Ohio Valley, Great Lakes, northern Rockies and Pacific Northwest.</p> <p>The greatest chance for warmer-than-average conditions are in western Alaska and the Central Great Basin and Southwest extending through the Southern Plains, according to NOAA.</p> <p>A "Triple Dip" means this is the third year in a row that the U.S. will experience La Niña conditions.</p> <p>"It is exceptional to have three consecutive years with a La Niña event. Its cooling influence is temporarily slowing the rise in global temperatures – but it will not halt or reverse the long-term warming trend," Petteri Taalas, the secretary-general of the World Meteorological Organization, said in a recent report.</p> <p>La Niñas are usually preceded by El Niño, a weather pattern that warms the surface of the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean; however, an El Niño event did not occur before the current La Niña, according to Michelle L'Heureux, a climate scientist for NOAA.</p>

It's not unprecedented for the weather pattern to last more than nine months to a year, which is typical for a La Niña, according to NOAA.

According to the National Centers for Environmental Prediction, La Niñas occurred several times between 1903 to 2010 and 2010 to 2012.

La Niña's global effect

La Niña occurrences have a devastating global impact because of its effect on weather and climate, Richard Seager, Ph.D., a research professor at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory of Columbia University, told ABC News.

The weather has caused droughts in North and South America and equatorial eastern Africa. La Niña is also linked to floods in Asia, such as the devastating floods Pakistan has endured since June, Seager said.

NOAA forecasts that the expected La Niña winter season, which is from December 2022 to February 2023, in the U.S. won't be atypical, as the northern Plains, Rockies and Pacific Northwest will also experience cooler temperatures; the South will be hotter than normal and the East Coast may be warmer than it usually is during that time of the year, according to L'Heureux.

Human-induced climate change?

According to WMO, naturally occurring climate events are viewed as happening because of "human-induced climate change," leading to global temperatures and extreme weather conditions.

"The worsening drought in the Horn of Africa and southern South America bear the hallmarks of La Niña, as does the above average rainfall in South-East Asia and Australasia," Taalas said in the report. "The new La Niña Update, unfortunately, confirms regional climate projections that the devastating drought in the Horn of Africa will worsen and affect millions of people."

According to Seager, it isn't safe to say that the changing climate causes this type of La Niña pattern because it has happened before, but he acknowledges that climate change may play a role.

"The record of sea surface temperatures we have that goes back a century and a half shows that the tropical Pacific Ocean has been moving in the direction that, although it warmed up in the west, it hasn't warmed up in the eastern equatorial pacific," Seager said. "So, that trend in sea surface temperatures is making these persistent La Niñas more likely."

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HEADLINE	10/20 Hurricane flood damage to EVs: time bombs
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/hurricane-ian-flood-damage-evs-creating-ticking-time/story?id=91795016
GIST	<p>As Florida officials and residents continue to clean up and assess the damage caused by Hurricane Ian, they're discovering the storm has turned some electric vehicles into incendiary devices on roads, parking lots and even on the backs of tow trucks.</p> <p>Electric vehicles that were flooded and damaged by the storm have been catching fire without warning in incidents throughout the hardest hit areas in the state, according to State Fire Marshal Jimmy Patronis, who told ABC News his team has counted at least nine such incidents. In some cases, the EVs would burst into flames, stay on fire, then reignite hours later.</p> <p>The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has warned that EVs can ignite weeks after contact with saltwater.</p> <p>As storms increase in ferocity, and the sale of EVs increases worldwide, it's a phenomenon we are likely to see much more of says Eric Fredrickson of Call2Recycle, a non-profit which specializes in transporting lithium-ion batteries to recycling facilities.</p>

"Part of what we're dealing with right now is that this is the first major storm that we've had in an area where we have a high penetration of electric vehicles. So we're seeing these fires in these incidents more than we have with any of the other storms," he said.

It's also a challenge for firefighters who have to use between 8,000 to 12,000 gallons of water to put out the fires, more than 10 times as much as a gas engine-based vehicle, according to James Hammond, the assistant chief of operations at North Collier Fire Control & Rescue District.

"It's just a constant flow trying to cool them down and stop the battery," Hammond told ABC News.

Hammond said his teams would typically spend an hour putting out a traditional gas-powered vehicle, but have spent five or six hours dousing electric vehicles.

Saltwater flooding is the main factor behind these fires, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The flooding creates a chain reaction in the engine and the batteries that made the parts more likely to catch on fire, the agency said.

The biggest concerns, according to firefighters and safety experts, is that it is still unknown what could spark the blaze in the first place. Something as simple as turning the wheel following the saltwater damage could start the fire in the vehicle, experts said.

The issue has gotten so bad that some tow truck drivers in Florida have refused to pick up flood-damaged EVs. Tim Baker, a tow truck driver, told ABC News that one car he picked up caught on fire after he brought it to his lot.

"They have the potential to catch fire pretty much any time," he told ABC News.

NHTSA responded to a request by Florida state fire marshal Jimmy Patronis, who asked for guidance on the problem stating, "Lithium-ion vehicle battery fires have been observed both rapidly igniting and igniting several weeks after battery damage occurred. Timing of the fire initiation is specific to the battery design, chemistry and damage to the battery pack."

The agency recommends that flooded EVs be parked at least 50 feet from any structures, vehicles or combustibles.

"Always assume the battery and associated components are energized and fully charged," the NHTSA said in its letter to the state.

Patronis also called on automakers to work with the state to come up with solutions and procedures when dealing with the flooded EVs.

"As [EVs] grow in popularity, this is a potential threat that we're going to have to deal with," he told ABC News. "I want to create solutions that work, other than just providing water to try to control the temperature of a battery that is burning out of control."

One solution is education, according to Fredrickson.

"We're definitely going to see more cars flooded by saltwater if we don't take steps to educate consumers about the consequences and the risks of an electric vehicle that gets flooded by saltwater," he said.

Fredrickson said the simplest way of avoiding an EV car fire is moving the car away from a potential flood area before a major storm, and if a car is submerged in salt water unplugging it from the wall before power is restored could be key to preventing it from bursting into flames.

That's a concern going forward, according to Bobby Schneider of the Energy Security Agency, a company contracted to help mitigate EV car fires.

	<p>He said there could still be hundreds of EVs stored in people's garages in Florida that could turn into potential fire hazards once power is returned to the grid.</p> <p>Schneider said that with the increased use of EVs, thousands of fire departments and first responders across the country need to be trained in "the uniqueness and particulars of the hybrid and electric vehicles."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Slavery on ballot for voters in 5 states
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/slavery-ballot-voters-us-states-91795353
GIST	<p>NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- More than 150 years after slaves were freed in the U.S., voters in five states will soon decide whether to close loopholes that led to the proliferation of a different form of slavery — forced labor by people convicted of certain crimes.</p> <p>None of the proposals would force immediate changes inside the states' prisons, though they could lead to legal challenges related to how they use prison labor, a lasting imprint of slavery's legacy on the entire United States.</p> <p>The effort is part of a national push to amend the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that banned enslavement or involuntary servitude except as a form of criminal punishment. That exception has long permitted the exploitation of labor by convicted felons.</p> <p>"The idea that you could ever finish the sentence 'slavery's okay when ... ' has to rip out your soul, and I think it's what makes this a fight that ignores political lines and brings us together, because it feels so clear," said Bianca Tylek, executive director of Worth Rises, a criminal justice advocacy group pushing to remove the amendment's convict labor clause.</p> <p>Nearly 20 states have constitutions that include language permitting slavery and involuntary servitude as criminal punishments. In 2018, Colorado was the first to remove the language from its founding frameworks by ballot measure, followed by Nebraska and Utah two years later.</p> <p>This November, versions of the question go before voters in Alabama, Louisiana, Oregon, Tennessee and Vermont.</p> <p>Sen. Raumesh Akbari, a Democrat from Memphis, was shocked when a fellow lawmaker told her about the slavery exception in the Tennessee Constitution and immediately began working to replace the language.</p> <p>"When I found out that this exception existed, I thought, 'We have got to fix this and we've got to fix this right away,'" she said. "Our constitution should reflect the values and the beliefs of our state."</p> <p>Constitutions require lengthy and technically tricky steps before they can be tweaked. Akbari first proposed changes in 2019; the GOP-dominant General Assembly then had to pass the changes by a majority vote in one two-year legislative period and then pass it again with at least two-thirds approval in the next. The amendment could then go on the ballot in the year of the next gubernatorial election.</p> <p>Akbari also had to work with the state Department of Correction to ensure that inmate labor wouldn't be prohibited under her proposal.</p> <p>The proposed language going before Tennessean voters more clearly distinguishes between the two: "Slavery and involuntary servitude are forever prohibited. Nothing in this section shall prohibit an inmate from working when the inmate has been duly convicted of a crime."</p>

“We understand that those who are incarcerated cannot be forced to work without pay, but we should not create a situation where they won’t be able to work at all,” Akbari said.

Similar concerns over the financial impact of prison labor led California's Democratic-led Legislature to reject an amendment eliminating indentured servitude as a possible punishment for crime after Gov. Gavin Newsom’s administration predicted it could require the state to pay billions of dollars at minimum wage to prison inmates.

Scrutiny over prison labor has existed for decades, but the 13th Amendment's loophole in particular encouraged [former Confederate states after the Civil War](#) to devise new ways to maintain the dynamics of slavery. They used [restrictive measures, known as the “Black codes”](#) because they nearly always targeted Black people, to criminalize benign interactions such as talking too loudly or not yielding on the sidewalk. Those targeted would end up in custody for minor actions, effectively enslaving them again.

Fast-forward to today: Many incarcerated workers make pennies on the dollar, which isn't expected to change if the proposals succeed. Inmates who refuse to work may be denied phone calls or visits with family, punished with solitary confinement and even be denied parole.

Alabama is asking voters to delete all racist language from its constitution and to remove and replace a section on convict labor that's similar to what Tennessee has had in its constitution.

Vermont often boasts of being the first state in the nation to ban slavery in 1777, but its constitution still allows involuntary servitude in a handful of circumstances. Its proposed change would replace the current exception clause with language saying "slavery and involuntary servitude are forever prohibited in this State.”

Oregon's proposed change repeals its exception clause while adding language allowing a court or probation or parole agency to order alternatives to incarceration as part of sentencing.

Louisiana is the only state so far to have its proposed amendment draw organized opposition, over concerns that the replacement language may make matters worse. Even one of its original sponsors has second thoughts — Democratic Rep. Edmond Jordan told The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate last week that he's urging voters to reject it.

The nonprofit Council for a Better Louisiana warned that the wording could technically permit slavery again, as well as continue involuntary servitude.

Louisiana's Constitution now says: “Slavery and involuntary servitude are prohibited, except in the latter case as punishment for a crime.” The amendment would change that to: "Slavery and involuntary servitude are prohibited, (but this) does not apply to the otherwise lawful administration of criminal justice.”

“This amendment is an example of why it is so important to get the language right when presenting constitutional amendments to voters,” the nonprofit group said in a statement urging voters to choose “No” and lawmakers to try again, pointing to Tennessee's ballot language as a possible template.

Supporters of the amendment say such criticisms are part of a campaign to keep exception clauses in place.

“If this doesn't pass, it will be used as a weapon against us,” said Max Parthas, state operations director for the Abolish Slavery National Network.

The question stands as a reminder of how slavery continues to bedevil Americans, and Parthas says that's reason enough to vote yes.

“We’ve never seen a single day in the United States where slavery was not legal,” he said. “We want to see what that looks like and I think that’s worth it.”

HEADLINE	10/19 Russia warns UN against drone probe
SOURCE	https://www.dw.com/en/russia-warns-un-against-probing-use-of-iran-made-drones-in-ukraine/a-63501534
GIST	<p>Russia on Wednesday warned the United Nations against investigating the use of Iranian drones in Ukraine.</p> <p>Earlier, Ukraine said Iran broke a UN Security Council embargo on the transfer of drones with a 300-kilometer range. Kyiv invited UN specialists to examine the debris from Shahed-136 drones that were being deployed by Russia to attack civilian targets.</p> <p>The discussions occurred during the closed-door Security Council meeting called by the US, France, and the UK in response to the deployment of Iranian-made drones to Russia. The trio of permanent members of the UN Security Council said Russia had breached the UN arms embargo on Iran.</p> <p>How has Russia used the Shahed-136 drones in Ukraine?</p> <p>On Monday, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said that the city was struck by "kamikaze drones" that killed people and damaged several residential buildings.</p> <p>Both the European Union and United States said they have proof that Iranian Shahed-136s low-cost drones, that explode on landing, are behind at least five deaths in Kyiv on Monday.</p> <p>In a little more than a month, Ukraine claims to have shot down more than 220 Iranian drones, and images have surfaced that appear to establish an Iranian connection.</p> <p>Ukraine has already moved to sever diplomatic ties with the Islamic Republic.</p> <p>What did the US and UK say?</p> <p>The US expressed its concerns regarding Russia's acquisition of the drones from Iran.</p> <p>According to the US, the drones violated UN Security Council Resolution 2231 of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. It contends that Resolution 2231 bars any transfers that could benefit nuclear-capable ballistic missiles.</p> <p>US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said, "We now have abundant evidence that these UAVs are being used to strike Ukrainian civilians and critical civilian infrastructure." He added, "We will not hesitate to use our sanctions and other appropriate tools on all involved in these transfers,"</p> <p>James Kariuki, Britain's deputy U.N. ambassador, tweeted Tehran's denial that Russia is using Iranian drones to target civilians in Ukraine "doesn't stand up to scrutiny."</p> <p>How has Russia reacted?</p> <p>Russia said that the UN does not have the mandate to investigate its use of drones in Ukraine calling it "absolutely unprofessional and political."</p> <p>"The UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) used by the Russian army in Ukraine are manufactured in Russia," Russian diplomat Dmitry Polyanskiy said, criticizing the "baseless accusations and conspiracy theories."</p> <p>"I would recommend that you do not underestimate the technological capabilities of the Russian drone industry."</p> <p>Polyanskiy said the UN probe would force Russia to reassess their collaboration with the international organization, where it has a permanent seat on the Security Council.</p> <p>Iran has already denied any drone transfers to Russia calling the claims "unfounded and unsubstantiated"</p> <p>Iran's UN envoy, Amir Saeid Iravani, said that Tehran wanted a "peaceful resolution" of the war.</p>

Cyber, Tech Awareness

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HEADLINE	10/20 Disgruntled affiliates impact ransom groups
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/news/ransomware/expect-more-attacks-from-disgruntled-ransomware-affiliates-researchers-say
GIST	<p>Researchers from Intel 471 on Thursday reported that ransomware groups are increasingly becoming impacted by disgruntled affiliates, a trend that may cause serious issues for both law enforcement agencies and security teams.</p> <p>Beth Allen, senior threat intelligence analyst at Intel 471, said a case in point was this past quarter when LockBit files containing builder code were leaked by a disgruntled coder, an action she said demonstrates that even well-established affiliate groups can struggle with operational security.</p> <p>“This trend is likely to continue in the future as more affiliates become disgruntled,” Allen said. “It will likely create a power vacuum within the cyber underground, spawning an overabundance of new ransomware variants and groups, making it more difficult for law enforcement agencies to track and thwart them, and businesses to defend against them, due to alternate tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) used.”</p> <p>Allen added that ransomware groups are almost certain to continue evolving and adapting their TTPs, along with using well-established ones, such as utilizing double extortion tactics. “The end goal of any ransomware group is to make as much money as possible in the shortest amount of time, while inflicting as much disruption as possible to achieve this,” Allen said.</p> <p>While Intel 471 observed 455 ransomware attacks in Q3 of this year, a decrease of 72 attacks from Q2, Allen pointed out that overall, the number of businesses impacted by ransomware will likely increase because it’s seen as a highly lucrative business model.</p> <p>“So with economic instability being predicted globally, individuals will possibly turn to criminal means conducted from the comfort of their own home as a way to supplement their income,” Allen said.</p> <p>Mike Parkin, senior technical engineer at Vulcan Cyber, added that while an apparent reduction in ransomware attacks is welcome, it doesn’t mean we’re “winning the war,” against these cybercriminal gangs. Parkin said the frequency of these attacks ebb and flow based on everything from law enforcement activity to what exploits are effective to internal politics within, or between, the gangs.</p> <p>“It’s entirely possible that the advantage currently lies with the defense, at least for now, however, it’s not something we can count on,” Parkin explained. “It’s impossible to predict when the next wave of cybercrime will come rolling in, but we know that it will.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/21 BlackByte ransomware new data theft tool
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/blackbyte-ransomware-uses-new-data-theft-tool-for-double-extortion/
GIST	<p>A BlackByte ransomware affiliate is using a new custom data stealing tool called 'ExByte' to steal data from compromised Windows devices quickly.</p> <p>Data exfiltration is believed to be one of the most important functions in double-extortion attacks, with BleepingComputer told that companies are more commonly paying ransom demands to prevent the leak of data than to receive a decryptor.</p>

Due to this, ransomware operations, including [ALPHV](#) and [LockBit](#), are constantly working on improving their data theft tools.

At the same time, other threat actors, like [Karakurt](#), don't even bother to encrypt local copies, solely focusing on data exfiltration.

The Exbyte data exfiltration tool

Exbyte was discovered by security researchers at Symantec, who say that the threat actors use the Go-based exfiltration tool to upload stolen files directly to the Mega cloud storage service.

Upon execution, the tool performs anti-analysis checks to determine if it's running on a sandboxed environment and checks for debuggers and anti-virus processes.

The processes Exbyte checks are:

- MegaDumper 1.0 by CodeCracker / SnD
- Import reconstructor
- x64dbg
- x32dbg
- OLLYDBG
- WinDbg
- The Interactive Disassembler
- Immunity Debugger – [CPU]

Also, the malware checks for the presence of the following DLL files:

- avghooka.dll
- avghookx.dll
- sxin.dll
- sf2.dll
- sbiedll.dll
- snxhk.dll
- cmdvrt32.dll
- cmdvrt64.dll
- wpespy.dll
- vmcheck.dll
- pstorec.dll
- dir_watch.dll
- api_log.dll
- dbghelp.dll

The BlackByte ransomware binary also implements these same tests, but the exfiltration tool needs to run them independently since data exfiltration takes place before file encryption.

If the tests are clean, Exbyte enumerates all document files on the breached system and uploads them to a newly-created folder on Mega using hardcoded account credentials.

"Next, Exbyte enumerates all document files on the infected computer, such as .txt, .doc, and .pdf files, and saves the full path and file name to %APPDATA%\dummy," explains the report by Symantec.

"The files listed are then uploaded to a folder the malware creates on Mega.co.nz. Credentials for the Mega account used are hardcoded into Exbyte."

BlackByte is still going strong

BlackByte launched operations in [the summer of 2021](#), and by February 2022, the gang had breached many private and public organizations, including [critical infrastructure in the United States](#).

	<p>Symantec analysts report that recent BlackByte attacks rely on exploiting last year's ProxyShell and ProxyLogon flaw sets in Microsoft Exchange servers.</p> <p>Moreover, the intruders use tools such as AdFind, AnyDesk, NetScan, and PowerView to move laterally. Recent attacks employ version 2.0 of the ransomware, removing Kernel Notify Routines to bypass EDR protections, as Sophos analyzed in an October report.</p> <p>Like other ransomware operations, BlackByte deletes volume shadow copies to prevent easy data restoration, modifies firewall settings to open up all remote connections, and eventually injects itself in a "scvhost.exe" instance for the encryption phase.</p> <p>According to an Intel 471 report published yesterday, in Q3 2022, BlackByte targeted primarily organizations in Africa, likely to avoid provoking Western law enforcement.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/21 Interpol: cyber-related crimes biggest threat
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/cyberenabled-crimes-are-biggest/
GIST	<p>Cyber-related crimes such as money laundering, ransomware and phishing pose the biggest threat to society, according to the first ever Interpol <i>Global Crime Trend</i> report.</p> <p>The inaugural study was compiled from data received from the policing organization's 195 member countries, as well as information and analysis from external sources.</p> <p>Money laundering was ranked the number one threat, with 67% of respondents claiming it to be a "high" or "very high" risk. Ransomware came second (66%) but was the crime type that most (72%) expected to increase in the next 3–5 years.</p> <p>Of the nine top crime trends identified in the report, six are directly cyber-enabled, including money laundering, ransomware, phishing, financial fraud, computer intrusion and child sexual exploitation.</p> <p>Interpol warned that the pandemic had fomented new underground offerings like "financial crime-as-a-service," including digital money laundering tools which help to lower the barrier to entry for criminal gangs.</p> <p>It also claimed that demand for online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) content surged during the pandemic. Some 62% of respondents expect it to increase or significantly increase in the coming years.</p> <p>The findings represent something of a turnaround from pre-pandemic times, when drug trafficking regularly topped the list of police concerns.</p> <p>Thanks to a surge in corporate digitalization, home working and online shopping, there are now rich pickings to be had from targeting consumers and business users with cyber-scams and attacks, Interpol claimed.</p> <p>The policing body has certainly been busy over recent months.</p> <p>Between March and May this year, its Operation First Light 2022 saw thousands of suspects arrested and tens of millions of dollars intercepted as part of a crackdown on email and phone-based fraud.</p> <p>Earlier this month its Operation Jackal led to the arrest of 75 suspects thought to be part of the infamous Black Axe organized crime gang.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/21 EnergyAustralia targeted in cyberattack
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SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/oct/21/energyaustralia-latest-to-be-hit-by-cyber-attack-as-details-of-hundreds-of-customers-exposed?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>EnergyAustralia has become the latest company to be targeted by a cyber-attack, with hundreds of customers' details exposed.</p> <p>In a statement released late on Friday, the electricity company said 323 residential and small business customers were affected by unauthorised access to their online platform, My Account.</p> <p>Details including customer names, addresses, email addresses, electricity and gas bills, phone numbers and the first six and last three digits of their credit cards are all included with those accounts.</p> <p>The company said there was "no evidence" customer details were transferred outside the company's platform.</p> <p>They also said sensitive documents such as driver licences or passports were not stored on the platform.</p> <p>"There is no evidence that customer information was transferred outside EnergyAustralia's systems, and importantly, identification documentation, such as driver's licences or passports, and banking information, are not stored on My Account."</p> <p>"This information remains secure. No other EnergyAustralia systems were affected."</p> <p>Customers are now required to implement 12-character passwords, which will have to include a mix of capital and lower case letters, numbers and special characters.</p> <p>Only eight characters were previously required for account passwords.</p> <p>The breach occurred on 30 September, and affected users were contacted on 2 October, with the company also briefing regulatory authorities and government agencies.</p> <p>EnergyAustralia chief customer officer, Mark Brownfield, apologised for the breach in the statement, urging customers to change their passwords.</p> <p>"We apologise for the concern that this issue may have caused our customers," he said.</p> <p>"While this incident was limited in terms of customers affected, we take the security of customer information seriously and have been working hard to put in place additional layers of security to ensure the protection of all customer information.</p> <p>"This now includes the implementation of 12-character passwords. We recognise the transition to more secure passwords won't be easy for all our customers, however, this incident and other recent cyber incidents have highlighted this is where we need to go with password complexity."</p> <p>The breach comes after Optus and Medibank were recently the targets of major cyber-attacks.</p> <p>Cybercriminals claim to have stolen 200 gigabytes of customer data from Medibank, which potentially includes personal details such as medical procedures and diagnoses, addresses, Medicare numbers and credit card information.</p> <p>The company "unreservedly" apologised for the data breach, with the company working with the Australian Signals Directorate and the Australian federal police.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Text scam called 'pig butchering'
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SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-text-scam-called-pig-butcherer-cost-her-more-than-1-6-million-11666258201?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos5
GIST	<p>The text message on Jane Yan's mobile phone came from a number she didn't recognize. "Are we going to the salon tonight?" It looked like the kind of mistake that can happen any day.</p> <p>In fact, it was part of a continuing scam that cost U.S. victims more than \$429 million in losses last year, according to the Internet Crime Complaint Center, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's clearinghouse for consumer complaints about online crime.</p> <p>Three months after beginning a conversation with the person who texted her, Ms. Yan had lost more than \$1.6 million, the victim of a wave of messages that have flooded onto mobile devices this year via text message and social media, according to law-enforcement officials.</p> <p>In Santa Clara County, Calif., complaints about these scams have skyrocketed over the past two years as people have become more accustomed to meeting and doing business virtually, said Jeff Rosen, the county's district attorney.</p> <p>The scam preys on basic decency—the impulse to help someone who sends a message by mistake—and loneliness, Mr. Rosen said. "There are a lot of lonely people out there, and while the vast, vast majority of people are not going to respond to that kind of text, a few will," he said.</p> <p>The average losses reported from these scams are \$300,000, Mr. Rosen said.</p> <p>The scammers are often based in Asia, where the con is known as "pig butchering"—a reference to the practice of first "fattening" the victim's cryptocurrency account with fake gains before the scam ends, according to advocacy groups and law-enforcement officials.</p> <p>The Global Anti-Scam Organization, a nonprofit that works to help victims and raise public awareness on scams, has counted more than 2,000 victims so far, and they tend to be successful professionals, said Brian Bruce, chief of operations with the group. "They've got Ph.D.s; they're successful business owners; they're senior managers," he said. "One scammer said to me, 'We don't talk to Uber drivers or farmers.'"</p> <p>Jane Yan's text about the salon came on Jan. 20. Normally she would have ignored it, she said, but she didn't. "You must have the wrong person," she responded.</p> <p>The person sending the text said he was "Eric," a Chinese businessman who was stuck in Seattle because of Covid. He was very polite and apologized for the wrong number. Then he started asking her questions. "Are you working here? Are you going to school here?" he asked. They began to chat, eventually by voice, but not about serious or financial topics. Eric liked to discuss family, food and popular culture, Ms. Yan remembered. He offered advice on life.</p> <p>Eric claimed to be a widower with an 8-year-old daughter. He was trying to bring her up and plan for her future. Ms. Yan, the mother of two college-age students, said she could relate.</p> <p>Married to an American and living in Delaware for more than 30 years, Ms. Yan, a 51-year-old business analyst, welcomed the opportunity to speak her native Chinese. She and Eric quickly became friendly. He would send her photos of the food he was cooking. He was charming, she said, and would teach her the latest pop songs by calling her and singing over the phone.</p> <p>Within a month, they were talking about money. Eric said he had more than \$10 million, mostly made from cryptocurrency investments, she said. Had Jane invested in crypto? he asked. She said no, she wasn't interested. By then, she thought of him as a trustworthy friend. On Feb. 15, she opened her first account with the cryptocurrency exchange Coinbase.</p> <p>As cryptocurrency has become more mainstream and convenient to use, it is easier for scammers to persuade their victims to set up digital currency accounts through which money can be moved</p>

internationally in seconds, said Zacharia Baldwin, a supervisory special agent with the FBI in Miami. “The popularity and adaptation of digital currency has made this explode,” he said.

Eric was likely working out of a compound in Asia. Often these scams operate as businesses in certain regions, said Mr. Bruce, of the Global Anti-Scam Organization. He said his group has interviewed employees of these outfits who say the operators sometimes hire psychologists to write scripts for the scammers to read.

In many locations, the workers operate under inhumane conditions and are sometimes subject to physical abuse, Mr. Bruce said. “If you don’t perform, you get abused in some form or fashion,” he said. “And performing means cheating and deceiving others.”

Mr. Bruce himself was the victim of one of these scams in 2021. He lost more than \$191,000 to someone who connected with him out of the blue on LinkedIn and claimed to have previously worked at the same company as Mr. Bruce, he said.

In February, Ms. Yan said she transferred \$5,000 into an investment platform called BQBEX.top. As of this week, the website was no longer online. It described itself as “the world’s leading digital asset trading platform,” according to a July 29 screenshot of the site taken by the web-analysis platform Urlscan GmbH. The website’s operators couldn’t be reached for comment.

After three minutes of trading Ms. Yan believed she had made \$1,000. A month later, in March, she invested \$400,000, and Eric had lent her another \$100,000 to make her total account balance more than \$500,000. Quickly, she made a 20% return on that. The exchange seemed too good to be true.

It was too good to be true. By April 30, she had invested her retirement fund in BQBEX, borrowed money from family members, invested her children’s college money and her husband’s retirement fund, she said. Because she felt she owed Eric money, she felt pressure to get money out of the account. Every time she tried, there was one more fee to pay, a little more to pay to the scammers.

Ms. Yan needed to invest more to initiate a money transfer. She had to pay money to get a lock taken off her account. And then she had to pay taxes.

By April 29, she still didn’t have her money. The exchange told her she needed to pay another \$260,000 to unlock her Coinbase wallet.

By then, her total losses were \$1.66 million, she said.

“That night, I felt very, very uneasy,” she said. “I thought there was something wrong.”

The next day, she reported her case to the police. She gave Eric’s name and number to a private investigator in Washington state. The investigator told her that Eric didn’t exist.

Ms. Yan reported her case to law enforcement, including staff at Mr. Rosen’s office in Santa Clara County, which has developed expertise in helping victims of these scams. She said she has been at times overwhelmed by feelings of guilt and self-blame.

“I haven’t really smiled since I found out that this happened,” she said. “I feel really helpless and hopeless.”

The best response to one of these text messages is to ignore it, Mr. Rosen said. “If someone asks you to deposit money somewhere, don’t do that,” he said. “Call your local police department.

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HEADLINE	10/20 FBI: student loan forgiveness scammers
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/fbi-warns-students-against-loan/

GIST	<p>The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has released a new public service announcement warning against fraudulent websites, emails, texts or phone scams aiming to defraud individuals seeking federal student loan forgiveness.</p> <p>According to the document, scammers are attempting to solicit personally identifiable information (PII), financial information or payment from potential victims.</p> <p>The warning comes amidst the backdrop of the recently released Student Loan Debt Relief Plan, which will provide targeted student debt cancellation to borrowers with incomes below \$125,000 (or joint filers with incomes below \$250,000) with loans held by the US Department of Education.</p> <p>The loan forgiveness will deliver up to \$20,000 of debt cancellation for Pell Grant recipients and up to \$10,000 for other borrowers.</p> <p>“When significant and newsworthy events occur, in this case, the student loan forgiveness, certain kinds of opportunists almost always show up to build scams to capitalize on the attention,” Sean McNee, CTO of DomainTools, told <i>Infosecurity</i>.</p> <p>“A lot of these scams will involve phishing, and one of the key ways to avoid getting caught by a phishing attack is to be aware of look-alike domains and websites.”</p> <p>Case in point, the FBI has now declared that cyber-criminals may attempt to offer entrance into the federal student loan forgiveness program and then use their schemes to receive payment for services they will not provide or collect victim information they can use to facilitate a variety of other crimes.</p> <p>“Threat actors are good at creating domain names that can fool a lot of users by looking very similar to legitimate domains. It’s important to keep vigilant about phishing and its 'cousins' (such as smishing – phishing over SMS),” McNee added.</p> <p>According to the executive, while ransomware makes news, the losses from phishing are still considerably higher.</p> <p>“Ultimately, since this specifically affects people’s financial information, including their Social Security number and other personally identifiable details, these kinds of phishing attacks can be devastating.”</p> <p>To help potential victims protect themselves from these hacking attempts, the FBI has released several tips, which are available in the original text of the announcement.</p> <p>Its publication comes months after the Bureau and Australian Federal Police jointly claimed to have found two websites containing over 300,000 unique sets of credentials obtained via credential stuffing.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/19 MultiCare system reveals security breach
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article267522778.html
GIST	<p>While CommonSpirit Health’s ransomware attack has been dominating local news cycles, another local health care provider recently revealed its own security breach — this one affecting employees.</p> <p>In an announcement posted on its website Oct. 12, Tacoma-based MultiCare Health System revealed that it was part of a security incident that targeted Kaye-Smith, a third-party entity that prints W-2 and 1099 forms for the health system.</p> <p>“In early June 2022, Kaye-Smith confirmed that they were subject to a ransomware attack involving several of their customers including MultiCare,” the release said. “The names, addresses and Social Security numbers for a number of current and former MultiCare employees were included in the data acquired without authorization.”</p>

It added that “MultiCare was officially informed that the breach included its employees’ information on Sept. 30, 2022.”

According to the health system, Kaye-Smith re-secured the data “and instituted a monitoring program to search for any exposure of the data”

It added that there was no evidence so far “that any of the data was or will be made available to the public.”

This week, letters were being sent to affected workers and former employees.

“Impacted employees will be offered two years of free credit monitoring and protection through Equifax Credit Watch Gold,” the health system said.

MultiCare was not alone in Kaye-Smith’s data breach.

Becker’s Hospital Review reported this week that patients and employees with five other health systems were listed in the same breach, including 3,800 individuals from Seattle-based UW Medicine and 6,750 individuals from Seattle Children’s, as well as 31,573 individuals from Boise-based St. Luke’s Health System.

Delta Dental also has been affected, and individual company announcements posted online show entities such as World Vision and Nations Lending Corp. also are part of the Kaye-Smith breach list.

Separately, CommonSpirit Health announced this week that its Virginia Mason Franciscan Health sites in the Puget Sound region were slowly coming back online and regaining access to their online medical network and records after a multi-week outage. The outage was the result of steps taken by CommonSpirit Health in a ransomware attack first announced as an IT security incident Oct. 3.

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HEADLINE	10/20 CISA 2023 focus: hospital, school, water
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/cisa-to-focus-on-hospital-school-and-water-cybersecurity-over-the-next-year/
GIST	<p>The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency over the next year will focus its efforts on improving the digital defenses of three critical infrastructure sectors, the organization’s chief said Thursday.</p> <p>The Homeland Security Department cyber wing will train its attention on three critical infrastructure sectors full of “target-rich, resource-poor” entities, namely water, hospitals, and K-12 schools, CISA Director Jen Easterly said at Mandiant’s mWISE conference in Washington, DC.</p> <p>Her comments came a week after a senior Biden administration official said the White House would work with entities in communications, water and healthcare to strengthen the cybersecurity of those sectors.</p> <p>Easterly specifically cited the recent ransomware attack on the Los Angeles Unified School District, calling it a “case study” for cyber incident reporting because the victim reached out to the FBI and CISA for assistance.</p> <p>“We were working with them very early on and they were very transparent... They did a press conference, they said, ‘This is what we know. And this is what we’re going to do about it and we’re going to keep you informed.’ That transparency really raises the bar and raises all boats,” according to Easterly.</p> <p>“When you understand what the threat is you can prepare yourself,” she added. “It’s like in a neighborhood. You’d want to know if your neighbor got robbed because you’re gonna put your shields up. You’re going to be on guard and have that level of vigilance. That’s really where the country needs to be.”</p>

	<p>Easterly also said CISA plans to publish the final version of its cross-sector cybersecurity performance goals next week. The metrics were originally due in July under a national security memorandum issued last year that addressed cybersecurity for industrial control systems utilized in critical infrastructure.</p> <p>“For the first time I think we’re going to be able to materially measure the reduction of risk across the most critical areas,” Easterly said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Public sector cybersecurity trends
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/cloud/8-trends-driving-cybersecurity-in-the-public-sector?slide=1
GIST	<p>As state and local governments operate under increasing threats of ransomware attacks, geopolitical threats, and breach attempts of citizens' personally identifiable information, cybersecurity awareness is on the rise in the non-federal public sector.</p> <p>According to the 2022 Deloitte-NASCIO Cybersecurity Study, state-level cybersecurity is growing more mature as lawmakers and bureaucrats have started seriously responding to the risks at hand. Today, no state lacks a CISO, state-level budgets are on the rise, and many foundational cybersecurity controls are in place.</p> <p>However, states still struggle with the cybersecurity talent gap, and they're dogged by legacy infrastructure that's not keeping pace with new technology and threats. What's more, municipalities are still very spotty in their cybersecurity strategy and execution, as there's very little cohesive guidance at the state level about municipal efforts to shore up protection and response.</p> <p>The following are some key statistics and trends from this report, which is based on a survey of CISOs from 53 US states and territories.</p> <p>Lawmakers Are Noticing State lawmakers are sitting up and taking notice of the threat to government resources posed by cyber risks. They're turning that awareness into action by codifying and funding CISO roles and requiring state-level cybersecurity programs.</p> <p>The study found that the number of states requiring a CISO or equivalent by state statute or law is on the rise, with 44% of states requiring and funding a CISO position and 10% more working on that process.</p> <p>Programmatic requirements still haven't quite reached a tipping point in most areas, however. For the most part, the majority of states do not have cyber threat information-sharing programs, cyber workforce development and training, or a cybersecurity legislative council to do periodic reviews of the state's cybersecurity posture.</p> <p>Budgets on the Rise Respondents from 30 states reported they increased their cybersecurity budgets over the past year, with only 2% of states reducing their budget. The study shows that just a few states are allocating more than 10% of their IT budget to cybersecurity.</p> <p>Interestingly, many of those surveyed were unsure of what percentage of their IT budget cybersecurity comprised. This could potentially be a product of the increasing decoupling of cybersecurity from the IT budget line item.</p> <p>Results showed that most states these days have a dedicated budget line item for cybersecurity these days, some established by statute, others by governor's orders, and still others through CIOs or other state administrators.</p> <p>Top Challenges Shifting Slightly The top challenges faced by state CISOs are shifting as budget situations improve.</p>

When the survey was last conducted in 2020, budget concerns comprised two of the top five challenges. Now the list has added the sophistication of threats and the challenges around decentralized IT and security infrastructure as new pain points. Staffing concerns remain on the list, as does the challenge of legacy infrastructure and solutions to support emerging threats, which has now shifted to the top slot.

Cyber Governance Strengthening

The study showed that all states now have a CISO, even though not all US territories do, and that some states are now deepening their cyber-risk leadership bench with CPOs, CROs, and [identity](#) program directors.

These leaders are also being called to account with more regular reporting to their governors, state legislators, and agency secretaries.

Local Governments Lagging

While state agencies are increasingly bolstering their capabilities around security awareness, [incident response](#), risk assessment and vulnerability assessments, threat monitoring and SOC, and identity and access management, local governments are lagging. For example, whereas 67% of state agencies are in the most mature stages of [security awareness training](#), only 8% of local governments can say the same.

Local and State Cyber-Collaboration Is Rare

Collaboration between state and local entities for cybersecurity still remains a rarity. The study found that not many CISOs engage with local governments or [state public education institutions](#) to lead the charge on cybersecurity strategies.

Only about 35% of state CISOs say they have strong collaboration ties with local government entities. Approximately 65% of respondents say this is due to local resistance to state oversight.

Staffing Challenges

While cybersecurity budgets have increased, state staffing levels have not significantly changed in the past two years. As mentioned earlier, access to talent is a challenge for state CISOs, and that is reflected in how long it is taking to [fill open roles](#) in the cybersecurity department. Almost three-fourths (71%) of respondents report it takes three months or longer to fill mid-level positions, and 46% say it takes six months or longer to fill director-level spots.

Outsourcing Fills the Gaps

Often state CISOs are filling their talent gaps with outsourced resources.

A quarter of state-level enterprise security offices employ the equivalent of 16 or more full-time equivalents through cybersecurity contractors. And the percentage of CISOs who reported they're contracting with a [managed security services provider](#) to fill staff competency gaps has shot up from 51% in 2020 to 78% in 2022.

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HEADLINE	10/20 AAH healthcare system data breach
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/health-system-data-breach-due-to-meta-pixel-hits-3-million-patients/
GIST	<p>Advocate Aurora Health (AAH), a 26-hospital healthcare system in Wisconsin and Illinois, is notifying its patients of a data breach that exposed the personal data of 3,000,000 patients.</p> <p>The incident was caused by the improper use of Meta Pixel on AAH's websites, where patients log in and enter sensitive personal and medical information.</p> <p>Meta Pixel is a JavaScript tracker that helps website operators understand how visitors interact with the site, helping them make targeted improvements.</p>

However, the tracker also sends sensitive data to Meta (Facebook) and is then shared with a massive network of marketers who target patients with advertisements that match their conditions.

This privacy breach has taken the U.S. by storm, as Meta Pixel is used by many hospitals in the country, exposing millions of people to third parties and sparking [class action lawsuits](#) against the responsible organizations.

In August 2022, U.S. healthcare provider Novant Health disclosed its improper use of Meta Pixel in its implementation of the 'MyChart' portal, [exposing 1.3 million patients](#).

The 'MyChart' patient portal is also used by AAH, along with another platform named 'LiveWell,' both of which had active Meta Pixel trackers.

"When patients used Advocate Aurora Health patient portals available through MyChart and LiveWell platforms, as well some of our scheduling widgets, certain protected health information ("PHI") would be disclosed in certain circumstances, particularly for users concurrently logged into their Facebook or Google accounts." - AAH.

AAH's [data breach notification](#) says that the following information may have been exposed via Meta Pixel:

- IP address
- Dates, times, and locations of scheduled appointments
- Proximity to an AAH location
- Medical provider information
- Type of appointment or procedure
- Communications between MyChart users, which may have included first and last names and medical record numbers
- Insurance information
- Proxy account information

AAH reported that the breach affected 3 million people to the U.S. Department of Health, which listed it on its [breach report portal](#).

The healthcare provider has disabled the Pixel tracker on all systems and is implementing safeguards to prevent a similar exposure from happening again.

Patients are advised to use their web browsers' tracker-blocking features or use incognito mode when logging in on medical portals. Those with a Facebook or Google account should review their privacy settings.

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HEADLINE	10/20 OldGremlin hackers use Linux ransomware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/oldgremlin-hackers-use-linux-ransomware-to-attack-russian-orgs/
GIST	<p>OldGremlin, one of the few ransomware groups attacking Russian corporate networks, has expanded its toolkit with file-encrypting malware for Linux machines.</p> <p>The gang has Russian-speaking members that have been operating since at least March 2020 using self-made malware, focusing on Russian companies in the logistics, industry, insurance, retail, real estate, software development, and banking sectors.</p> <p>Also known as TinyScouts, due to the names of the functions in the malicious code they use, OldGremlin is characterized by a small number of campaigns per year with million-dollar ransom demands.</p>

In 2022, OldGremlin launched just five campaigns but they also demanded the highest ransom in the two and a half years of activity, \$16.9 million, say researchers at Group-IB, a Singapore-based cybersecurity company.

OldGremlin's ransomware for Linux

Group-IB researchers have been tracking OldGremlin and their tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) since the first attacks attributed to the group in March 2020.

During an incident response engagement this year, Group-IB found that OldGremlin targeted a Linux machine with a Go variant of the TinyCrypt ransomware the gang uses to encrypt Windows machines.

The researchers say that the Linux variant works in the same way as the Windows counterpart, using the AES algorithm with the CBC block cipher mode to encrypt files with a 256-bit key, which is encrypted using the RSA-2048 asymmetric cryptosystem.

The malware executable is wrapped using Ultimate Packer (UPX) and appends the *.crypt* extension to the encrypted files, among them being *.RAW*, *.ZST*, *.CSV*, *.IMG*, *.ISO*, *.SQL*, *.TAR*, *.TGZ*, *.DAT*, *.GZ*, *.DUMP*.

Campaigns this year

Breaching the target is done through carefully prepared phishing emails that impersonate well-known organizations - RBC media group, consultant groups, developers of management systems, lobby groups, Minsk Tractor Works, a dental clinic, financial entities, law firms, a company in the metals and mining industry.

In campaigns this year, OldGremlin also started with a malicious email but changed the malware delivery method. Instead of distributing the initial stage payload directly through a malicious document, the attacker switched to tricking the victim into downloading the document from a file-sharing service.

The first payload is TinyFluff, a NodeJS backdoor that provides remote access to the system and the possibility to download additional payloads.

OldGremlin stays on the victim network for more than a month (49 days on average), collecting information that allows the discovery of high-value systems for encryption.

The group relies on a self-developed toolkit that includes the following:

- a reconnaissance tool
- malicious LNK files
- multiple backdoors (TinyPosh, TinyNode, TinyFluff, TinyShell)
- tool to extract data from Credential Manager
- tool to bypass antivirus software
- tool to isolate a device from the network
- TinyCrypt ransomware

The toolkit strongly suggests that OldGremlin is a highly skilled actor carefully preparing attacks to leave its victims with no other choice but to pay the ransom.

Apart from the custom tools, the attacker also uses open-source and commercial frameworks like PowerSploit and Cobalt Strike.

OldGremlin attacks this year come after a period of relative stagnation in 2021 when the group carried out just one phishing campaign and demanded \$4.2 million from the victim.

The total number of attacks that researchers attribute to OldGremlin has now reached 16, most of them dating from 2020.

	<p>Although most ransomware gangs avoid targets in Russia and the countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region, Russian companies are still targeted for file-encrypting attacks.</p> <p>"OldGremlin has debunked the myth that ransomware groups are indifferent to Russian companies. According to our data, the gang's track record includes almost twenty attacks with multi-million ransom demands, with large companies becoming their preferred targets more often" - Ivan Pisarev, Head of Dynamic Malware Analysis Team at Group-IB</p> <p>Several groups do not align with this rule, which is followed by the letter by Russian cybercriminals, Dharma, Crylock, and Thanos being some of the most active in 2021.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Subsea cables cut; impacts global internet
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/technology/internet-connectivity-worldwide-impacted-by-severed-eu-subsea-cables/
GIST	<p>A major internet subsea fiber cable in the South of France was severed yesterday at 20:30 UTC, causing connectivity problems in Europe, Asia, and the United States, including data packet losses and increased website response latency.</p> <p>Cloud security company Zscaler reports that they made routing adjustments to mitigate the impact. However, users still face problems due to app and content providers routing traffic through the impacted paths.</p> <p>"Zscaler is working with the content providers to have them influence their portion of the path," reads a notice from Zscaler.</p> <p>"If you experience slowness with specific applications, especially applications hosted overseas, please contact the application provider and refer them to this trust post."</p> <p>The repair crews moved quickly on the scene but had to wait for the police to collect evidence before they were allowed to work on restoring the damage.</p> <p>At 23:00 UTC, it was confirmed that the incident had impacted three links: Marseille-Lyon, Marseille-Milano, and Marseille-Barcelona.</p> <p>The last update on the situation came at 01:00 UTC when Zscaler's repair crews restored one of the links, but the technicians continued observing packet losses and latency for some destinations.</p> <p>Cable damages in the UK too</p> <p>At the same time, BCC reports that another subsea cable linking the Shetland Islands to the Scottish mainland has been damaged, too, leaving netizens on the island isolated from the rest of the world.</p> <p>Not only that, but it has also reduced the capacity of Shetland's population of 23,000 to call for emergency services, as communication has been impacted in general.</p> <p>Police Scotland has issued an advisory today urging people not to make unnecessary calls, as the few available lines should remain open for emergencies.</p> <p>This incident comes as technicians were already working on fixing the link between the Faroe Islands and Shetland, which was also severed last week.</p> <p>Faroese Telecom's head of infrastructure Páll Vesturbú told the BBC that the cable cuts are believed to have been done by fishing vessels, though it's unusual to have two incidents simultaneously.</p> <p>Possible sabotage?</p>

	<p>Many assume that the chances of simultaneous undersea cable cuts in Europe due to fishing trawlers are slim and that sabotage is the only likely explanation.</p> <p>This isn't hard to believe during global geopolitical crises that motivate nations to damage energy and telecommunications infrastructure.</p> <p>If the total internet outage in Shetland were to happen in a larger and more populous place, it would cause a catastrophic economic standstill and jeopardize the well-being of its people.</p> <p>As for who might do something like that, western analysts have repeatedly warned that Russian submarines can cause underwater damage or cut cables buried in the seabed to protect from bottom trawlers.</p> <p>However, investigations into all recent incidents are still underway, and no attribute for these acts of sabotage has been established yet.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Report: Musk to cut 75% Twitter workforce
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/report-elon-musk-plans-cut-75-twitter-workforce-91834884
GIST	<p>SAN FRANCISCO -- Elon Musk plans to lay off most of Twitter's workforce if and when he becomes owner of the social media company, according to a report Thursday by The Washington Post.</p> <p>Musk has told prospective investors in his Twitter purchase that he plans to cut nearly 75% of Twitter's employee base of 7,500 workers, leaving the company with a skeleton crew, according to the report. The newspaper cited documents and unnamed sources familiar with the deliberations.</p> <p>San Francisco-based Twitter and a representative for Musk attorney Alex Spiro did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment.</p> <p>While job cuts have been expected regardless of the sale, the magnitude of Musk's planned cuts are far more extreme than anything Twitter had planned. Musk himself has alluded to the need to cull some of the company's staff in the past, but he hadn't given a specific number — at least not publicly.</p> <p>"A 75% headcount cut would indicate, at least out of the gates, stronger free cash flow and profitability, which would be attractive to investors looking to get in on the deal," said Wedbush analyst Dan Ives. "That said, you can't cut your way to growth."</p> <p>Ives added that such a drastic reduction in Twitter's workforce would likely set the company back years.</p> <p>Already, experts, nonprofits and even Twitter's own staff have warned that pulling back investments on content moderation and data security could hurt Twitter and its users. With as drastic a reduction as Musk may be planning, the platform could quickly become overrun with harmful content and spam — the latter of which the Tesla CEO himself has said he'll address if he becomes owner of the company.</p> <p>After his initial \$44 billion bid in April to buy Twitter, Musk backed out of the deal, contending Twitter misrepresented the number of fake "spam bot" accounts on its platform. Twitter sued, and a Delaware judge has given both sides until Oct. 28 to work out details. Otherwise, there will be a trial in November.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Amazon shuts online store fabric.com
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/amazon-shuts-online-fabric-store-91826785
GIST	<p>NEW YORK -- Amazon is shutting down a subsidiary that's been selling fabrics for nearly 30 years, the latest move by the online retail giant to cut costs.</p>

In a note posted on its website, fabric.com said it will no longer sell products and directed customers to shop on Amazon instead. Thursday is the last day customers can place orders on the fabric site.

“As part of our regular business planning, we continually evaluate the progress and potential of our offerings and have made the decision to close Fabric.com,” Amazon spokesperson Betsy Harden said in a prepared statement.

It’s unclear how many employees will be impacted by the closure. Harden said Amazon will work with staff to help them “identify other opportunities” at the company, including at nearby warehouses. Employees who do not stay with Amazon will be given severance, she said.

News of the closure was first reported by the Craft Industry Alliance.

Georgia-based Fabric.com was founded in 1993 under the name Phoenix Textiles Group. It operated as a wholesale distributor of apparel fabrics for several years before it launched its own website and began selling items directly to consumers.

Amazon acquired the company in 2008. At the time, it said it would help the fabric site expand its selection of items and allow Amazon to offer its customers more sewing and crafting supplies.

The closure of the business comes as Amazon is attempting to cut costs amid worries about the wider economic environment and sluggish online sales. In recent months, it has shuttered its hybrid virtual, in-home care service Amazon Care, implemented a hiring freeze on the corporate side of its retail business and axed some of its other projects.

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HEADLINE	10/19 Twitter: fake accounts amplify China CCP
SOURCE	https://www.nisos.com/blog/twitter-fake-accounts-amplify-ccp-for-national-congress/
GIST	<p>Nisos researchers investigated a social media influence campaign on Twitter that is amplifying Chinese state-run media for the 20th National Congress to promote and disseminate pro-Chinese Communist Party (CCP) narratives targeting Chinese and English-language audiences.</p> <p>Nisos researchers identified 1,463 inauthentic Twitter accounts amplifying 13 Chinese state-run media videos and articles over 5,000 times. The accounts posted between October 12-14 and again on October 17, 2022.</p> <p>The overall narrative of these articles portray China and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in a positive light, particularly regarding the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, which began on October 16, 2022 and continues through October 22, 2022.</p> <p>Nisos researchers made the following findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The network amplified 10 Chinese state-run news media videos and articles from between October 12-14 in the leadup to the 20th National Congress and three Chinese state-run news media videos and articles on October 17, 2022 after the first day of the 20th National Congress.▪ The campaign consisted of at least 1,463 unique Twitter accounts.▪ The campaign conducted 5,383 quote Tweets using identical post language to amplify Chinese state-run media messages on Twitter.▪ Several users within the coordinated inauthentic network labeled the posts numerically one through 10 for posts identified on October 12 and 14 2022, indicating that the posts were scripted and written on a centralized list.▪ Of the 1,463 unique Twitter accounts exhibiting coordinated inauthentic behavior, 944 accounts amplified posts between October 12-14 and again on October 17, 2022. This indicates that the incidents were not isolated and ongoing activity is a coordinated effort by a single network or coordinated group of networks.

	As of the writing of this report, amplifying posts of Chinese state-run media appear to be continuing on Twitter as the 20th National Congress progresses. Therefore, we assess coordinated inauthentic amplification of Chinese state-run media posts on Twitter will continue through at least the end of the 20th National Congress on October 22, 2022.
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HEADLINE	10/20 Vice Society thrives in crucial blind spot
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/vice-society-ransomware-gang/
GIST	<p>A RANSOMWARE ATTACK on the Los Angeles Unified School District in the first week of September crippled digital operations across the system, which includes more than 1,000 schools and serves roughly 600,000 students. Two weeks after the initial attack, as the district worked to recover and restore its systems, the hackers said that they would leak the 500 gigabytes of data they claimed to have stolen from LAUSD if the school system didn't pay a ransom.</p> <p>After the school system refused to pony up, the hackers released the trove, which contained sensitive data of students who had attended LAUSD between 2013 and 2016, including their Social Security numbers, financial and tax information, health details, and even legal records. And as LAUSD set up a hotline for worried families and scrambled to deal with the fallout, the hacking group behind the attack moved on, seemingly without making any money off the incident.</p> <p>That's Vice Society for you.</p> <p>The apparently Russian-speaking group is a prolific ransomware actor that has hit an array of educational institutions since emerging at the end of 2020. But in addition to focusing on schools, Vice Society is notorious for targeting health care facilities and hospitals—a sector long-plagued by ransomware attacks, but one that some hacking groups pledged not to target at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Amidst a nonetheless brutal wave of North American hospital ransomware attacks in 2020, though, Vice Society's activity has been just unremarkable enough to keep the group out of the spotlight.</p> <p>“We would probably think of them as a second- or maybe third-tier group overall, compared to big names like LockBit, Hive, and Black Cat,” says Allan Liska, an analyst for the security firm Recorded Future who specializes in ransomware. “But the bulk of their victims are either in the education or health care sectors, and their attacks make up a significant chunk of the total known attacks in those categories for 2021 and 2022 so far. They loom large in those two sectors.”</p> <p>Vice Society is, in many ways, an unremarkable ransomware gang. The group relies on exploiting known vulnerabilities like PrintNightmare to gain access to victims' systems and may sometimes buy a foot in the door from criminal actors known as “initial access” brokers. Once inside a network, Vice Society uses automated scripts and takes advantage of an organization's own network management tools to conduct standard reconnaissance and exfiltrate data. Then the group deploys prepackaged ransomware.</p> <p>Shortly after the LAUSD attack, the United States Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and the FBI published an alert about Vice Society, noting that the group is “disproportionately targeting the education sector with ransomware attacks.” The agencies added that “Vice Society is an intrusion, exfiltration, and extortion hacking group ... [The] actors do not use a ransomware variant of unique origin.”</p> <p>In addition to its technically unremarkable attacks, Vice Society has also hit targets around the world, spreading its victims between North America, South America, and Europe.</p> <p>Throughout 2021, Vice Society's health care targets included Barlow Respiratory Hospital in California, Eskenazi Health in Indiana, Centre Hospitalier D'Arles in France, United Health Centers in California, and a dental company in Brazil. The group also attacked New Zealand's Waikato District Health Board that summer, which, among other impacts, resulted in the cancellation of two Air New Zealand flights; the airline couldn't obtain proof of negative Covid-19 tests for crew members because the health department's digital systems were down.</p>

Vice Society also targeted schools and universities in 2021 and seems to have favored this sector more and more as the United States and other countries devote more resources to ransomware enforcement and hone mitigation techniques. In the wake of high-profile 2021 attacks, like the [Colonial Pipeline ransomware incident](#), prominent Russian-speaking actors faced infrastructure takedowns, indictments, and even rare [Russian arrests](#) for their brazen crimes.

Vice Society may view education as a quieter and less well funded category where it can fly under the radar. For example, the group hit the Austrian Medical University of Innsbruck in June and Linn-Mar Community School District in Iowa at the beginning of August—neither of which many people would flag as major, obvious targets. The Bluets maternity hospital in Paris [accused the group last week](#) of a ransomware attack on its systems. Vice Society has not taken credit so far for the hack.

“They’re a perfect example of the success of mediocrity in the ransomware ecosystem,” says Claire Tills, a researcher for the security firm Tenable who has studied Vice Society's tactics and organization. “You have the top-tier groups developing their own zero days and acting all polished and professional. But meanwhile, Vice Society is just chugging along, not really innovating, stealing tools from other folks, but they have just enough stability to launch attacks, get paid, keep moving.”

Researchers view the group's attack on the Los Angeles Unified School District as significant because LAUSD is a major target, and it made more of a splash than most of Vice Society's other hacks. Tills notes that the group may not have understood the scale and prominence of the school district it was taking on or may have chosen the target deliberately as a test of whether it was ready to up its game and focus on larger victims. But the apparent failure to secure payment and [scrutiny](#) that came from the incident may have warned the group off of such visible attacks.

“They're focusing on not necessarily big targets. Not everyone is aware of how bad and how devastating these attacks are, because they are so regional and they don't necessarily break into the mainstream,” Recorded Future's Liska says. “You may not want to be [Conti](#) and [take down a whole country's health care system](#), because if you do, you're going to draw the ire of these countries.”

By focusing on lesser-known schools, Tenable's Tills warns, Vice Society may be able to maintain its low profile and continue its streak if defenders and law enforcement don't make mid-tier ransomware groups a higher priority.

“Vice Society has taken the approach of knowing that the education sector isn't doing great emotionally or financially,” Tills says. “Schools are under so much pressure after being closed on and off for two years, and ransomware actors know that the more stressed people are, the more likely they are to make suboptimal decisions. The group's success makes them sustainable, but they're still kind of written off. So they're not getting raided or arrested that we've seen so far. They're a really good example of what we as an industry are not paying enough attention to.”

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HEADLINE	10/20 New Ursnif variant likely shifting focus
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/10/latest-ursnif-variant-shifts-focus-from.html
GIST	<p>The Ursnif malware has become the latest malware to shed its roots as a banking trojan to revamp itself into a generic backdoor capable of delivering next-stage payloads, joining the likes of Emotet, Qakbot, and TrickBot.</p> <p>"This is a significant shift from the malware's original purpose to enable banking fraud, but is consistent with the broader threat landscape," Mandiant researchers Sandor Nemes, Sulian Lebegue, and Jessa Valdez disclosed in a Wednesday analysis.</p> <p>The refreshed and refactored variant, first spotted by the Google-owned threat intelligence firm in the wild on June 23, 2022, has been codenamed LDR4, in what's being seen as an attempt to lay the groundwork for potential ransomware and data theft extortion operations.</p>

Ursnif, also called Gozi or ISFB, is one of the oldest banker malware families, with [the earliest documented attacks](#) going as far back as 2007. Check Point, in August 2020, mapped the "[divergent evolution of Gozi](#)" over the years, while pointing out its fragmented development history.

Almost a year later in late June 2021, a Romanian threat actor, Mihai Ionut Paunescu, was [arrested](#) by Colombian law enforcement officials for his role in propagating the malware to no fewer than a million computers from 2007 to 2012.

The latest attack chain detailed by Mandiant demonstrates the use of recruitment and invoice-related email lures as an initial intrusion vector to download a Microsoft Excel document, which then fetches and launches the malware.

The major refurbishment of Ursnif eschews all its banking-related features and modules in favor of retrieving a [VNC module](#) and gaining a remote shell into the compromised machine, which are carried out by connecting to a remote server to obtain said commands.

"These shifts may reflect the threat actors' increased focus towards participating in or enabling ransomware operations in the future," the researchers said.

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HEADLINE	10/19 Whitworth confirms ransomware attack
SOURCE	https://www.govtech.com/education/higher-ed/whitworth-university-confirms-data-breach-was-ransomware
GIST	<p>(TNS) — Whitworth University has informed the state attorney general's office that a data breach this summer was a ransomware attack that may have affected thousands of former and current students and staff.</p> <p>The notification was made in a letter dated Oct. 4 from the law firm Wilson Elser based in New York City. In the letter, the private university acknowledges for the first time publicly the data breach that occurred July 29 was a ransomware attack, a growing field of cyber crime in which hackers seize control of data and demand payment for its release. Under state law, a data breach affecting more than 500 residents of Washington must be reported to the Washington Attorney General.</p> <p>Whitworth said the breach may have affected 5,182 residents of Washington state. It's unclear how many more out-of-state residents employed or attending the school could be affected, because the university first reviewed its records to find Washington residents affected to meet a legal deadline of 30 days for notification, said Trisha Coder, media relations manager for the university.</p> <p>Coder also said she couldn't disclose whether the university paid a ransom, citing an ongoing criminal investigation.</p> <p>"Multiple unauthorized actors infiltrated our network," the October letter states.</p> <p>Those actors may have accessed names, student identification numbers, state identification numbers, passport numbers, Social Security numbers and health insurance information, according to the letter.</p> <p>University officials determined that hackers were not able to access a system that holds the most sensitive information, Coder said.</p> <p>"That was a very, very fortunate thing," she said.</p> <p>The school has since employed "third-party forensic specialists" to help bolster its security, and "wiped and rebuilt affected systems" after discovering the attack, according to the letter.</p> <p>Whitworth is unaware of any data being "misused and has not received any reports of related identity theft since the date of the incident," the letter reads. In addition, the university is providing free credit</p>

monitoring and identity theft protection through the consumer protection firm IDX. Potentially affected students and staff will be receiving notification of the service in the mail and have until Jan. 3 to apply, according to samples of the letter provided to the attorney general's office.

The university also notified law enforcement.

The FBI, which is in the midst of observing cybersecurity awareness month, said the best way to stop a ransomware attack is to avoid unknown attachments and files and create secure backups. The agency asks that ransomware victims not pay the ransom, because there's no guarantee the victim will get the data back and it could encourage further criminal activity.

Whitworth's letter does not identify any group or entity the university believes responsible for the data breach. Industry watchers linked the attack to a group called LockBit, which has been identified as a growing international security threat in recent years. LockBit was behind an alleged attack of the Ireland-based IT firm Accenture in August 2021, when hackers demanded \$50 million in payment for the release of stolen information.

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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	10/20 First material support charge corporation
SOURCE	https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?q=8025758f-2514-456d-b7d4-1262c80b3b1f
GIST	<p>On October 18, 2022, Deputy Attorney General (“DAG”) Lisa O. Monaco announced that Lafarge SA (“Lafarge”), a multi-national building materials manufacturer headquartered in Paris, France, and its Syrian subsidiary Lafarge Cement Syria (“LCS”) had pleaded guilty in the Eastern District of New York to conspiring to provide material support to foreign terrorist organizations, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and the al-Nusrah Front (ANF), in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 2339B.^[1] This case represents the first time in which the DOJ has brought such a material support charge against a corporation.^[2]</p> <p>According to the DOJ and as set forth in court filings, Lafarge and its subsidiary schemed to pay ISIS and ANF in exchange for permission to operate a cement plant in Syria from 2013 to 2014, which enabled LCS to obtain approximately \$70.3 million in revenue. In 2015, Lafarge was acquired by the Swiss multi-national Holcim Ltd. (“Holcim”), which, according to the DOJ, failed to conduct appropriate pre- or post-acquisition due diligence of Lafarge’s actions in Syria or to self-report the misconduct to the DOJ once it was discovered.^[3] U.S. District Judge William F. Kuntz II sentenced Lafarge and LCS to terms of probation and to pay financial penalties, including criminal fines and forfeiture, totaling \$777.78 million. Acknowledging the defendants’ efforts to remediate compliance programs after the misconduct was discovered, as well as various commitments to ensure compliance in the future, the DOJ determined that the appointment of an independent compliance monitor was “unnecessary.”^[4]</p> <p>Practice Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• As the DAG stated in announcing the guilty pleas, this case “sends the clear message to all companies, but especially those operating in high-risk environments, to invest in robust compliance programs, pay vigilant attention to national security compliance risks, and conduct careful due diligence in mergers and acquisitions.”^[5] Companies that do business in countries subject to, or where individuals or entities are subject to, various U.S. sanctions should redouble their efforts to make sure sanctions are at the forefront of their approach to compliance all along their supply chains. This is true not just for companies that traditionally focus on compliance with U.S. sanctions and anti-money laundering laws and regulations, such as financial institutions, but for companies in all industries that do business internationally.• Although the facts of the Lafarge case are egregious, the case is “instructive of the Department’s corporate crime priorities,” as the DAG observed in announcing the resolution.^[6] Those priorities include aggressively prosecuting corporate crime and corruption, and taking a harder line about when to bring charges against corporations, as opposed to resolving potential criminal liability

through Deferred Prosecution Agreements.^[7] Finally, the DAG explained that another top priority for the DOJ is “individual accountability,” and that, although the DOJ did not itself charge individuals involved in the Lafarge misconduct, “French authorities have arrested many of the senior executives implicated in the scheme.”^[8]

- The resolution of the case, which did not include an independent compliance monitor, provides some evidence about the way in which the DOJ will determine whether to seek an independent compliance monitor as part of a corporate resolution in a case involving this type of misconduct. Here, although the misconduct went undetected for years and was not voluntarily reported to the DOJ, the plea agreement stated that the DOJ decided not to seek a monitor based on the defendants’ “remediation,” including “particularly the wholesale replacement of legacy Lafarge’s compliance program and internal controls with Holcim’s, and the enhancements to Holcim’s compliance program and internal controls following Holcim’s discovery of the misconduct,” as well as the DOJ’s “assessment of the current state of Lafarge’s compliance program and internal controls,” among other considerations.^[9] Thus, even after egregious misconduct, a company’s genuine and serious efforts to strengthen compliance policies and internal controls may help to avoid imposition of an independent compliance monitor.
- Sanctions and other national-security-related crimes really are, as the DAG described them, “the new FCPA.” Specifically, the DAG has explained that, just like the FCPA, sanctions-related charges are “relevant to an expanding number of industries,” have grown from a “unilateral effort by the United States to a worldwide movement to combat international corruption,” and “incentivize companies to come forward and voluntarily disclose discovered misconduct.”^[10] The DAG also emphasized that any multinational corporation or business with an international supply chain “needs to be pressure-testing its sanctions compliance program,” which should be at the “forefront” of its overall approach to compliance.^[11] The novel use of the material support terrorism charge—which allows for broad extraterritorial jurisdiction and can lead to extensive asset forfeiture—against a multi-national building materials corporation to address its payments to a foreign entity, here designated foreign terrorist organizations, illustrates how the DOJ is using sanctions-related charges as a key tool to combat corporate corruption, along with the FCPA.

The Charges and the Guilty Pleas

Lafarge and LCS pleaded guilty to an information charging a violation of 18 U.S.C. § 2339B, which prohibits persons from knowingly providing material support or resources to a foreign terrorist organization, and from attempting or conspiring to do so. “Material support” includes any tangible or intangible property, including currency, financial services and other monetary instruments.^[12] The violator must know that the organization receiving material support is a designated terrorist organization, such as ISIS or the ANF, but does not need to share the goals or beliefs of that organization. A violation of Section 2339B exposes the defendant to, among other penalties, extensive asset forfeiture, including forfeiture of “all assets, foreign or domestic,” of an entity “engaged in planning or perpetrating any Federal crime of terrorism” against the United States, citizens, or residents of the United States, or their property.^[13]

As set forth in the statements of facts that accompanied the guilty pleas, from approximately May 2010 to September 2014, Lafarge, through LCS, operated a cement plant in Northern Syria.^[14] After the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, Lafarge and LCS negotiated to pay armed factions in the civil war to protect LCS employees, to ensure continued operation of the plant, and to help give Lafarge and LCS a competitive advantage in the Syrian cement market. Among other things, LCS executives paid fixed monthly “donations” to groups, including ISIS and ANF, so that employees, customers, and suppliers could travel through checkpoints near the LCS plant. The executives eventually agreed to make payments to ISIS based on the volume of cement that LCS sold to its customers, effectively creating a revenue-sharing agreement. Lafarge and LCS executives analogized these payments as paying “taxes.” Lafarge and LCS executives conditioned some payments on ISIS’s assistance in imposing higher costs on, or even stopping the sale of, other cement imported into northern Syria.^[15]

Between August 2013 and October 2014, Lafarge and LCS used intermediaries to pay ISIS and ANF the equivalent of approximately \$5.92 million. As a result of the scheme, LCS obtained approximately \$70.30

million in total sales revenue from August 2013 through October 2014, and the total gains to all participants in the conspiracy, including LCS and ISIS, totaled approximately \$80.54 million.[\[16\]](#)

Lafarge and LCS executives took steps to conceal their activities, including by using personal email accounts and by requiring intermediaries to use false descriptions of services rendered to submit for payment to LCS. In addition, as Lafarge was being acquired by Holcim, Lafarge executives did not disclose the payments to ISIS and ANF during pre-acquisition diligence meetings. According to the DOJ, Holcim “conducted neither pre- nor post-acquisition due diligence of LCS’s operations in Syria,” which had ceased by the time the transaction closed.[\[17\]](#) Lafarge, LCS, and Holcim also did not self-report the conduct, and the DOJ determined that it did not receive timely and full cooperation with its investigation, although Holcim did conduct an internal investigation following media reports in 2016 and publicly disclosed its principal investigative findings in 2017.[\[18\]](#)

Although the aforementioned conduct occurred principally outside the United States, the papers reflect that the DOJ established jurisdiction under the material support statute’s broad provision for “extraterritorial jurisdiction” in several ways.[\[19\]](#) These included that the offense occurred in part within the United States, that the offense affected interstate commerce, and that the defendants conspired with a U.S. national. Although the DOJ did not specify the exact facts it relied upon to establish jurisdiction under each of these bases, the statement of facts noted, among other things, that Lafarge employees used U.S. email accounts, that Lafarge sent a wire transfer in furtherance of the scheme through a financial institution in New York, and that one Lafarge executive involved in the conduct was a U.S. citizen.[\[20\]](#) The DOJ also alleged, as an additional basis for extraterritorial jurisdiction, that the defendants were “brought into” and “found in” the United States after the offense conduct had occurred.[\[21\]](#) In announcing the guilty plea, the DAG emphasized again that “companies who identify misconduct should voluntarily self-report and cooperate with the Department in a timely and proactive fashion.”[\[22\]](#) According to the DAG, Lafarge “did neither.” Additionally, Lafarge failed to retain and produce communications sent over third-party messaging systems or have policies to enable such retention. The DAG also criticized Holcim for “not perform[ing] due diligence of Lafarge’s operations in Syria, despite the clear compliance risks posed by operations in the region” and not doing anything to “investigate or address Lafarge’s illegal activities until they were publicly exposed.”[\[23\]](#)

The plea agreement stated that the DOJ decided that the appointment of an independent compliance monitor as part of the resolution was “unnecessary” based on the defendants’ remediation, including particularly the wholesale replacement of legacy Lafarge’s compliance program and internal controls with Holcim’s, and the enhancements to Holcim’s compliance program and internal controls following Holcim’s discovery of the misconduct, and based on the [DOJ’s] assessment of the current state of Lafarge’s compliance program and internal controls, including ensuring that its compliance programs will satisfy the minimum elements set forth in [an addendum to the plea agreement], and the Defendants’ risk profile, including Lafarge’s agreement to report to the [DOJ] about its remediation and compliance efforts on a periodic basis.[\[24\]](#) That addendum to the plea agreement described a range of compliance and ethics policies related to anti-terrorism and sanctions laws, including “policies and procedures for mergers and acquisitions requiring that Lafarge conduct appropriate risk-based due diligence on potential new business entities, including appropriate anti-terrorism and sanctions due diligence by legal, accounting and compliance personnel.”[\[25\]](#)

The conduct underlying these charges and guilty pleas had been investigated not just in the United States but in France, and Lafarge is already facing charges in France for aiding and abetting crimes against humanity.[\[26\]](#) In announcing the charges, the DOJ thanked French authorities for their significant assistance in the U.S. case.[\[27\]](#)

Key Implications of the Lafarge Guilty Pleas:

- **Compliance and disclosure are critical:** DOJ’s growing focus on corporate crime related to U.S. sanctions, as well as DOJ’s new efforts to incentivize a corporation’s speedy and complete disclosure of misconduct,[\[28\]](#) combine to make it more important than ever for companies to have policies, programs, and training in place to identify potential misconduct and, where appropriate, to bring that misconduct to DOJ’s attention. The DAG has previously emphasized that, just as

	<p>with the FCPA, corporations evaluating sanctions and other national-security-related misconduct should consider prompt, voluntary disclosure, including through the National Security Division's Voluntary Disclosure Program, to receive cooperation credit from the DOJ. Here, although the misconduct was not voluntarily disclosed, the DOJ did credit Holcim's efforts to address the misconduct and enhance its own compliance program in deciding not to seeking the imposition of a compliance monitor.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate crime as national security crime: DOJ's efforts to use national security tools outside of the most traditional sanctions charges, such as the terrorism charge to which Lafarge pleaded guilty, against corporations show that corporations face growing legal risk from activities inside and outside the United States that relate to activities perceived as national security threats. That trend has been most evident in relation to the People's Republic of China, but this case shows the scope is far broader. The DAG made exactly this point in announcing the Lafarge guilty pleas: "In today's world, corporate crime regularly intersects with national security in areas like terrorist financing, sanctions evasion, and cybercrime."^[29] • U.S. sanctions enforcement gets increasingly global: DOJ's efforts to enforce U.S. sanctions will likely involve a growing number of international partners, such as the French authorities involved in the Lafarge matter. As DAG Monaco previewed in June 2022, "the months and years ahead will see the department's sanctions teams work hand-in-glove with civil and law enforcement agencies across the world. The multilateralization of our sanctions work follows the same trajectory as our FCPA history, which grew from a largely unilateral effort by the United States to a worldwide movement to combat international corruption."^[30]
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HEADLINE	10/20 Pakistan: militant attacks linked to Taliban
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-growing-militant-attacks-linked-to-taliban-takeover-of-afghanistan-/6798440.html
GIST	<p>Pakistan has experienced a spike in militant attacks, killing more than 450 people, mostly security forces, in the first nine months of this year. Officials dismiss the violence as "isolated incidents of terrorism."</p> <p>Islamabad attributes the resurgence in militancy to the Taliban takeover of the conflict-torn Afghanistan, where anti-Pakistan militants have taken refuge and continue to direct cross-border attacks from there.</p> <p>Officials have confirmed the death of nearly 350 soldiers and personnel of other law enforcement agencies in hundreds of attacks in the first nine months of 2022.</p> <p>The outlawed Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the Pakistani Taliban, has claimed or is blamed for many of the attacks.</p> <p>Security officials told VOA that the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which borders Afghanistan, has experienced the highest number of TTP attacks, killing 96 soldiers and wounding at least 280 others. Separately, the provincial police department has confirmed the deaths of 82 police personnel.</p> <p>The remaining casualties in 2022 occurred elsewhere in Pakistan, largely in southwestern Baluchistan province, where ethnic Baluch insurgents have stepped up deadly ambushes and gun attacks against security forces. The natural resources-rich province borders Afghanistan and Iran.</p> <p>Pakistani security forces have also continued their push against militants and claimed killing hundreds of them.</p> <p>A Pakistani military official refuted suggestions that militancy is on the rise in Pakistan, saying years of counterterrorism missions instead have led to a marked improvement in the security situation across the country. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to media.</p>

"Due to [the] peculiar security situation in Afghanistan and [the] use of Afghan soil as [a] safe haven by terrorists against Pakistan, sporadic and isolated incidents have been happening in the newly merged districts, which by no means can be counted as [a] surge in terrorist incidents, when compared to [the] scale and lethality of terrorist incidents [that] happened in the past," the official told VOA.

He referred to several Pakistani districts formerly and collectively known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, or FATA. The volatile region for decades was governed by special controversial laws and served as a safe haven for both local and foreign-based militant groups.

However, sustained Pakistan military operations in recent years uprooted what officials described as a "terrorist infrastructure" in ex-FATA, merging the area into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through a constitutional amendment subsequently.

The Taliban government in Afghanistan, in responding to growing terrorism-related concerns, brokered and hosted peace talks between Pakistan and Afghan-based TTP commanders in recent months.

But the dialogue has failed to ease TTP-orchestrated violence and the process has apparently fallen apart over militant demands for restoring the traditional status of ex-FATA.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the chief spokesman for the Taliban government in Kabul, told VOA in a recent interview they were determined to address security concerns of Afghanistan's neighbors and would arrest for "treason" anyone using Afghan soil against Pakistan.

"Whoever is present here [in Afghanistan], they aren't allowed to carry out any such activities because they have assured us, they would not threaten another country. And if [they do] so, these people are committing treason against Afghanistan first. They must be hunted, arrested and punished," Mujahid told VOA.

Critics remain skeptical about the Taliban's claims they are effectively blocking terrorist groups from threatening other countries.

The rise in TTP extremist activities and the reemergence of its fighters in some of their former strongholds in northwestern Pakistan in recent weeks triggered a strong public backlash, with thousands of residents routinely taking to the streets demanding authorities restore security.

The Islamabad-based Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), an independent research and advocacy think tank, in a recent report, described the TTP as an "ideological and operational" partner of the Afghan Taliban.

"For Pakistan, the perils of a militant regime in Kabul have become unmistakably clear as the country has witnessed a mindboggling 51% increase in the number of terrorist attacks in a single year since the Taliban takeover," the PIPS wrote in its report.

"The Taliban regime avoids decisive action against the TTP probably as a strategy to extract concessions from Pakistan in bilateral affairs," the report noted.

Landlocked Afghanistan heavily relies on Pakistani overland and sea routes for bilateral as well as international trade. Islamabad has stepped up trade links with the Taliban government over the past year, hoping it would encourage the Islamist rulers to address Pakistani concerns in return for more economic incentives.

The revelation that al-Qaida leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri had been staying in a safe house in the heart of Kabul and his killing in a U.S. drone strike last July has also cast doubt on counterterrorism pledges by the Taliban and promises that they would cut ties with terrorist groups.

No country has yet recognized the Taliban government over human rights and terrorism-related concerns.

HEADLINE	10/19 Al-Shabab attacks key bridges in Somalia
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/al-shabab-attacks-key-bridges-in-somalia/6797032.html
GIST	<p>At least 21 people were killed in two separate bombings in the central Hirshabelle state of Somalia, officials said.</p> <p>A powerful car bomb exploded in Jalalaqsi town when soldiers operating a security checkpoint intercepted a vehicle. The checkpoint is near local government buildings and a military base belonging to African Union peacekeepers from Djibouti.</p> <p>“At around 2:30 p.m., a vehicle arrived at the checkpoint, one of the soldiers collecting taxation pointed a gun and stopped it,” said Mire Hussein Siyad, deputy district commissioner of Jalalaqsi.</p> <p>“When the gun was pointed at [it], the vehicle exploded,” Siyad told VOA Somali.</p> <p>He said Wednesday’s explosion killed at least 15 people, including the town’s two civilian leaders, Mayor Adan Mohamed Isse and Mohamed Nur Agajof Dabaashe, the district commissioner. Dabaashe was recently replaced as Jalalaqsi commissioner, but he had not handed over responsibility yet, Siyad said.</p> <p>Other victims included soldiers at the checkpoints and civilians including street vendors. The explosion destroyed a building near the checkpoint where the local officials were based. Siyad said two AU peacekeepers were injured in the attack.</p> <p>Siyad said the target was the town’s main bridge.</p> <p>Meanwhile, six other people including four civilians were killed a separate explosion, when a three-wheeled motorcycle with explosives attached, struck the Bulobarde town bridge. The important bridge links Somalia’s south and central regions. Pictures taken by the witnesses show the explosion partially damaged the bridge.</p> <p>The district commissioner of Bulobarde, Ahmed Mahad Nur, told VOA Somali that two men riding the motorcycle drove it onto the bridge. He said one of the men jumped off before the explosion while the second one detonated the explosive-laden motorcycle and died in the blast.</p> <p>Nur said the man who jumped was shot and killed by security forces. He said troops seized two other motorcycles laden with explosives.</p> <p>The officials said the two explosions were coordinated and intended to destroy the two bridges.</p> <p>“They wanted to bring down the two bridges at the same time,” Siyad said.</p> <p>“It’s the most crucial bridge between the central and southern regions,” said Nur.</p> <p>Nur vowed the local government will rebuild the damaged bridge.</p> <p>The al-Shabab militant group immediately claimed responsibility for the two attacks.</p> <p>Bulobarde and Jalalaqsi in the Hiran region (Hirshabelle state) have been the focal point of efforts to mobilize the local population against al-Shabab.</p> <p>Somali army spokesperson General Abdullahi Ali Anod on Tuesday reported that government forces and local fighters are completing preparations for new operations against al-Shabab in Hirshabelle, and in Southwest, Galmudug and Jubaland states. He said the operations could start within a “week or weeks.”</p> <p>Al-Shabab has threatened clans mobilizing against them with violence.</p>

HEADLINE	10/19 France repatriates 55 from Syria camps
SOURCE	https://www.dw.com/en/france-repatriates-55-women-and-children-from-camps-in-syria/a-63502091
GIST	<p>The French Foreign Ministry on Thursday said it had repatriated <u>dozens of women and children</u> from Kurdish-run camps in northeastern Syria.</p> <p>The repatriation is the largest in recent months and comes a week after the European Court of Human Rights <u>ruled that France must re-examine repatriation requests</u> from two women detained in Syria.</p> <p>What will happen to the returnees?</p> <p>The ministry said it had repatriated 40 children and 15 women from Syrian camps holding family members suspected of belonging to the so-called <u>"Islamic State" (IS) terror group</u>.</p> <p>"The minors have been transferred to child aid services," the ministry said in a statement. "The adults have been handed to judicial authorities."</p> <p>"France expresses its thanks to local authorities," the ministry noted, "for their cooperation which has made this operation possible."</p> <p>The repatriations come in addition to some 300 French minors who lived in the so-called Islamic State's areas of operation who previously returned to France, including 77 with government assistance.</p> <p>What's France's stance on repatriation?</p> <p>Paris has long refused to repatriate hundreds of French children held in the Kurdish-run camps. It has dealt with them on a case-by-case basis that human rights groups claim is deliberately drawn out.</p> <p>Last week, the European Court of Human Rights condemned French authorities for refusing to allow two women to return after a request from their parents. The court asked officials to quickly reexamine the case.</p> <p>The court did not issue a blanket ruling on the return of all French citizens held in Syria since the end of military operations against the terror group in 2019.</p> <p>However, it did say that safety and healthcare conditions at the camps "must be considered incompatible with applicable standards under international humanitarian law."</p> <p>Thousands of extremists from Europe and other parts of the West joined the group as fighters. They often took wives and children to live in the self-declared "caliphate" in territory conquered in Iraq and Syria.</p> <p>France has prioritized its security over welfare concerns for detained individuals, highlighting a series of attacks by the jihadist group, including the November 2015 assaults on Paris that killed 130 people.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Australia teen taught bombmaking online
SOURCE	https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-10-20/adelaide-teenager-will-confess-to-possessing-extremist-material/101556506
GIST	<p>A 15-year-old Adelaide schoolboy will confess to possessing "extremely depraved" extremist material and coaching others online about how to make bombs, a court has heard.</p> <p>Prosecutors have asked the South Australian Youth Court to sentence the boy, who cannot be named for legal reasons, as an adult in the District Court, where a bigger penalty could be imposed.</p> <p>If he is sentenced in the Youth Court, he faces a maximum of three years' detention.</p>

Prosecutor Aimee Winra told the court that the "gravity of the offending" meant the boy should be sentenced as an adult.

"This is not simply a case of a collection of a large volume of extremist material, which can only be categorised as extremely depraved and horrific in nature," Ms Winra said.

"The offending goes beyond that — there are active steps by the accused to provide guidance to others online on how to make explosives, suggesting he had a technical capacity to do so in pledging allegiance to the bay'a."

The concept of "bay'a" is to pledge allegiance to Islamic State.

She said detention centre staff also found drawings in his room of the Islamic State flag.

Chris Weir, for the boy, told Youth Court Judge Penny Eldridge that his client would plead guilty to the crimes, but further negotiations were needed to consolidate some of the counts before he officially entered his pleas.

"He's a young lad who was entrenched in his education and has a family who continues to support him," Mr Weir said.

He said the boy was receiving counselling in detention and taking part in a specialist program for children who are potentially radicalised.

"He doesn't accept that he is radicalised, but he accepts what he has done is wrong," he said.

Mr Weir submitted the boy does have insight into his offending and his prospects for rehabilitation were good.

He said the critical consideration was his age.

"He's at a crossroad in terms of dealing with the potential of his criminality and his rehabilitation," he said.

Ms Winra responded that his prospect of rehabilitation was not relevant to her application before the court. Judge Eldridge will decide whether he is sentenced as a youth or an adult later this month.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	10/21 France honors hero dogs
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/entertainment-france-africa-paris-af91f586ac9f78254dcd8247c722c62c
GIST	<p>SUIPPES, France (AP) — From tracking down suspects in the 2015 Paris terror attacks to fighting extremists in Africa's Sahel region, dogs have helped French soldiers, police officers and rescue teams save lives for more than a century.</p> <p>In recognition of the four-pawed partners, France this week inaugurated a memorial paying tribute to all "civilian and military hero dogs." It features a sculpture by French-Columbian artist Milthon depicting a World War I soldier and his dog huddled together.</p> <p>The monument is located in front of the town hall in Suippes, part of an area of northeast France that saw major battles during World War I. The placement acknowledges the important role dogs played in the U.S. and European armies of the time.</p>

Suippes is also home to the largest military kennel in Europe, where members of the French army's 132nd canine infantry regiment train dogs for military duty. The regiment currently consists of 650 army personnel and 550 dogs.

The monument in homage to hero dogs was an initiative of the French kennel club, the Centrale Canine. Animals from the army regiment attended Thursday's ceremony inaugurating the memorial wearing their military medals.

"It's very important (recognition) because dogs, like human beings, carry out missions, but we don't ask them for their opinion. So to me, it's fair to give them back a medal," Johann, an adjutant in a combat unit, said.

He and other human members of the unit could only be identified by their first names for security reasons related to their military status.

The regiment in Suippes is preparing dogs for combat zones where they would be tasked with sniffing out and chasing a potential enemy. Some are also trained to detect explosives and drugs. Each dog is paired with a soldier.

Johann, a member of the regiment for 12 years, is now paired with a Dutch shepherd named Nasky. He has not lost a dog in action, though has colleagues who have.

"It's significant from a psychological point of view and very hard for the handler. But in those moments, we take upon ourselves (to continue) and when we don't have our dog anymore, we still are infantry soldiers and we must be able to continue our missions," he said.

The regiment's recruits are involved in French operations abroad, including in Africa's Sahel region, West Africa and the Middle East. They also are sent on domestic missions and to work in French territories overseas, such as combating gold trafficking in French Guiana.

The dogs selected for training sometimes are recruited when they are puppies, but most are 18-months-old. Many come from France, others from the Netherlands, Germany and countries in eastern Europe.

They go through a series of tests to see whether they are enthusiastic about biting, willing to play and not easily startled in a stressful environment. The most important quality required is bravery, the regiment's soldiers said.

"We use a lot their olfactory sense, their sight, their physical abilities. That's why we have lots of Belgian, German shepherds, dogs who can run, who are resistant to heat and cold," canine unit member Audrey explained. "They are very good working dogs."

When they no longer can fulfill their missions, the dogs are retired. Audrey plans to keep her partner, Moocki, with her at home when the time comes. She explained "the handlers are the ones in best position to choose families" for retired dogs.

"We're trying, as handlers, to do this the best we can... depending on the dog, the character. Some dogs may also have post-traumatic stress disorder," she said.

France created its first department to train dogs for active duty during World War I. They searched for wounded soldiers, warned sentinels and carried messages, food and ammunition on the front lines of the 1914-1918 war.

Thursday's ceremony in France notably paid tribute to Diesel, a police dog killed in a raid targeting the mastermind of the Paris attacks in 2015, and to Leuk, an assault dog of the French military killed by an extremist in Mali in 2019.

	<p>Other nations have recognized the wartime contributions of dogs. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy awarded a medal to a Jack Russell terrier named Patron that sniffed for mines after Russia invaded Ukraine. Patron later received a visit from U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken who praised him as “world famous.”</p> <p>In the United States, the first national monument dedicated to military working dog teams was unveiled in 2013 at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland in Texas, home to the world’s largest training center for military dogs.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/21 RV horrors: shoddy work, unhappy buyers
SOURCE	https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/money/cars/2022/10/21/rv-horrors-defective-units-unhappy-buyers-a-near-death-experience/10551361002/
GIST	<p>Jenny Doman and her family stood beside a highway exit ramp watching helplessly as bright orange flames engulfed their brand-new RV.</p> <p>The fire quickly transformed their dreams of a carefree life in their new home-away-from-home to a nightmare.</p> <p>The Oregon family had purchased the 40-foot-long Heartland Road Warrior, a fifth-wheel trailer and "toy hauler" made by a subsidiary of Indiana-based Thor Industries, just one day earlier. The price tag was more than \$100,000.</p> <p>Excited to enjoy the new luxury RV, they hit the road for a trip to visit family in Utah, their RV in tow.</p> <p>But they only made it to Montana before the fire broke out near the rolling trailer's electrical panel.</p> <p>Pulling to the side of the road, Doman called 911 as she rushed to get her newborn out of the backseat of the family's pickup truck. Her 16-year-old son grabbed the crate carrying their two puppies. Her husband scrambled to disconnect the RV’s propane tank to avoid an explosion.</p> <p>Somewhere in the chaos, a good Samaritan came to help. The fire spread within minutes.</p> <p>Instead of spending the night in their new RV, Doman and her family found themselves standing near a rural Montana highway, in the middle of a snowy winter night, with nothing but the clothes on their backs and a diaper bag.</p> <p>Nearby, a thick cloud of smoke wafted into the sky as firefighters hosed down the last embers.</p> <p>“There goes our fifth wheel, toy hauler, everything in it. Oh my gosh,” Doman said in a video she later posted on YouTube. “I think I’m gonna throw up.”</p> <p>Pandemic drove demand for RVs</p> <p>The desire to get away from home yet remain isolated introduced a new kind of lifestyle for many people during the pandemic. Recreational vehicles and trailers like Doman's offered a vacation anywhere with all the comforts of home but not the crowds, costs or hassles of commercial travel.</p> <p>The RV industry — one of the biggest manufacturing sectors in Indiana — was quick to capitalize on this new and unprecedented demand.</p> <p>Last year, more RVs were built and sold than ever. Profits also soared to record highs.</p> <p>But on factory floors, already harried workers — some with only limited training — were pressed to build more and faster to meet higher production quotas, several current and former RV employees told IndyStar.</p>

The result is an expensive product that, in a growing number of cases, critics claim doesn't live up to the worry-free, unencumbered lifestyle the industry promises. It's a dream buyers often shell out six figures or more to enjoy.

Instead of traveling the country as they had planned, a growing number of RV owners are finding themselves stuck in hotel rooms, spending thousands of dollars they didn't plan to spend.

Meanwhile, RVs cycle in and out of repair shops. Some sit for months waiting to be fixed or for parts held up by global supply-chain issues.

Some belong to families who sold their houses to commit to the RV lifestyle full time. Some are owned by retirees with grand plans for their golden years and money to burn. Others are first-time owners. Their horror stories show up in lawsuits and a jump in recall notices.

The RV industry disputes claims of quality issues.

Thor Industries, the largest RV maker in the country and owner of Heartland RV, which made Doman's fifth wheel, said all of its companies have "robust quality standards," from its vendors and raw materials to the final inspections before the products are delivered to the dealers.

"Within the Thor family of companies," Thor said in a statement to IndyStar, "the customer experience is our ultimate measure of success."

Heartland RV didn't respond to a request for comment.

The RV Industry Association, a trade group and lobbyist for RV companies, also defended the industry's products. In a statement to IndyStar, the association said it has a program for all of its members that includes unannounced inspections to make sure factories are following safety standards on plumbing, propane, electrical and fire safety systems.

But RV owners, including those who bought units from Thor-owned companies, complain of problems that range from cracks on cabinets and improperly installed ceiling fans to more serious ones such as mold due to water damage, faulty electrical wiring and gas leaks. Many of those complaints can be found on social media, which is home to a large and active RV community.

Issues have become so common that another RV owner dubbed the units "COVID trailers." If they're built in the last two years, expect a lot of problems, RV owner John Kucharski told IndyStar.

The problems can run from minor annoyances to life-threatening dangers.

"I'm just glad we weren't asleep in that RV," said Doman. "Or we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Recalls up, quality down, critics say

The quality of RVs has been declining for at least the last 15 years, according to Ron Burdge, an Ohio attorney who has spent decades suing RV manufacturers over defective products.

Consolidations during economic downturns meant less competition and lower quality, Burdge said. Because of financial pressures, companies also had to build more cheaply to keep their profit margins. But, he added, this continued even during good economic years.

"And when they came out of that recession back in '08, quite frankly, my experience has been that they decided that, 'Hey, we can sell these things with less quality and make just as much money. So why should we go back to building better quality?'" he said. "And they just kept doing it. And it's only gotten worse over the years since then."

Recalls became more and more common — in part because parts suppliers are also under pressure to build fast, Burdge said. Defective products that go to multiple manufacturers meant multitudes of recalls.

Recalls jumped even more during the pandemic years.

Since 2020, three of the biggest RV manufacturers in the country have recalled hundreds of thousands of their products, according to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Companies owned by Thor Industries, the largest RV maker in the country, recalled more than 156,000 RVs this year. Forest River, a subsidiary of Warren Buffet's Berkshire Hathaway, recalled nearly 200,000 RVs this year. Winnebago Industries recalled more than 125,000 RVs this year.

All are among the highest for each company in the last five years.

Among the problems that led to recalls: gas leaks, various electrical issues, increased propane pressure and poorly installed awnings.

In its statement to IndyStar, Thor Industries said the quality of its units went up even as factories were producing more. The company cited its lower warranty claims for products sold during the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic years. But that doesn't account for the recalls.

Forest River didn't respond to requests for comment. Winnebago Industries didn't answer questions about alleged quality issues.

The pandemic also exposed a longstanding problem on factory floors, an IndyStar investigation found. RV workers don't need a license or certification to do electrical work and often receive little training to install plumbing or furnaces, several workers said. This has led not only to worker injuries, but also to problems with the products.

Kyle Ferguson worked in the industry for a decade, moving from one factory to another, before he quit last year. He said he was often rushing to finish units every day to keep up with production demands. At his last factory, the daily quota went up to 36 RVs a day.

Now, he fears buyers will have to take their RVs back to the dealers.

Because he spent years building RVs, Ferguson said, he would never buy one for himself.

"I would never ever — ever," he said. "I would never recommend a single one to anyone because I know how they're built."

'The worst day of my life'

The RV industry advertises itself well, said Burdge, the attorney who represents disgruntled owners. And there is some truth to the images it draws: Happy families. A carefree lifestyle. Freedom.

A young man and woman looking at a map as they plan their next adventure. Families enjoying cookouts around a campfire. Couples huddling together near the beach to watch the sunset, their home just a few feet away.

A nearly four-minute video on Thor Industries' website shows the idealized version of RV life, proclaiming: "Go Everywhere; Stay Anywhere."

"But what they're not telling people," Burdge said, "is that the RV that you buy today might well fall apart tomorrow."

The reality that confronted Doman in the hours after their RV was reduced to a charred ruin is a far cry from those blissful images. Sitting in a hotel room in Dillon, Montana, with her baby boy pressed against her chest, Doman sobbed.

"I think this is the worst day of my life," she said in a video.

Her husband, Trent Doman, was in the hospital for treatment of smoke inhalation. The breast milk Doman had pumped and saved for her 6-week-old son was gone. So were all the clothes the family packed for what should have been a two-week road trip.

She had to find a Safeway earlier that night to buy toothbrushes, diapers, baby formula and other basic necessities.

What happened to Doman and her family is a stark — perhaps extreme — example of what can go wrong.

'You just know you're going to buy crap'

Others, like John Kucharski, face a steady stream of issues that are not as devastating but add up to far more than just inconveniences.

Kucharski, a longtime camper, had spent years saving enough money to buy a brand-new RV. His plan was to spend his retirement years traveling the country with his fiancée.

So in December, he bought a brand new Keystone Cougar, a 40-foot trailer, and paid the full price of \$80,000. But problems became apparent as soon as he brought the RV home to Mesa, Arizona.

Among a long list of more than a dozen problems: The slide outs — portions of the RV that expand to create more living space — aren't sliding out properly. There's a rip on the kitchen floor. The frame of the back window is bent. The bolts that hold one of the couches together are stripped, so the back of the couch falls off. Drawers aren't opening properly.

"All these things are fixable and, at some point in the trailer's life, will go wrong," Kucharski said. "But when you buy brand new — and we're talking about a lot of money ... And to get home and see all this shoddy work."

The RV was sitting in a repair shop just three weeks after Kucharski bought it.

By August, a day before Kucharski was about to go on a six-day road trip, he saw the roof was coming off and large air bubbles had formed on its outer layer.

As some problems were fixed, new ones piled up.

"I don't even know where to begin. I would be so outrageously angry if I wasn't so disgusted," Kucharski said in a scathing email he sent last month to Keystone RV and the dealership.

Keystone RV did not respond to a request for comment.

But no matter how angry he becomes, Kucharski said he knows not much will change.

"Manufacturers and dealers expect consumers to fall in line to buy RVs. So why make them better?" Kucharski said. "You just know you're going to buy crap."

'It's like the Wild West'

What happens — from factory floors to dealerships to repair shops — is a long and "vicious cycle" that leaves costumers "frustrated and fed up," said longtime RV owner Robert Simmons.

When owners call dealerships about the problems, they say, they're told to call the manufacturers because the issues are covered by warranty. Some say they're told to call the parts suppliers. No matter where they turn for help, the wait is often several months.

"This entire industry has become lawless. It's like the Wild West," said Simmons, who's from Columbus, Ohio. "They just don't care."

Simmons and his wife bought their second RV, a brand-new luxury RiverStone Legacy — a product of Forest River — in April. He called it the Mercedes Benz or the Bentley of fifth wheels with a price tag of nearly \$170,000.

Almost immediately, they found out that the bedroom slide out was retracting on its own. They had no hot or cold water. The washer and dryer didn't work. The refrigerator was tilting backward. The ceiling fan was not screwed properly, so it wobbled.

Frustrated after failing to find someone in the industry to help them, Simmons and his wife found a boat technician to fix the water problem. He said someone at the factory installed the main water valve backward.

"What the hell were you guys doing building this thing?" Simmons said, adding that while problems began at the factory, they should've been caught during the pre-delivery inspection at the dealership that consumers paid for.

For now, his RV is stranded at a friend's property in Oregon. He said they had to leave it there after discovering the trailer hitch was not welded properly.

'I could've lost everything'

Jenny Doman said problems began almost immediately after they bought their RV. The fuse kept blowing on their first night, which meant they didn't have heat for hours. It was the middle of winter last year, just a few days before the holidays.

They headed southeast the next day. As night fell, she wanted to stop and get some sleep in the RV, but her husband insisted on driving a little longer, Doman recalled.

She shuddered at what would've happened if even just one thing happened differently.

If they stopped to sleep as she suggested. If there wasn't an exit right when they needed to stop. If there wasn't a bystander who helped Trent Doman disconnect the propane tank.

Jenny Doman estimates they lost about \$40,000 worth of belongings from the fire.

She said the likely culprit was electrical, a problem that she believes began on the factory floor and was overlooked at the dealership. The insurance company, which Doman said covered the loss of the trailer, was unable to determine the exact cause of the fire because the RV was completely destroyed, but Doman said the investigator believed it was due to electrical issues.

Doman said no one has explicitly accepted responsibility for the fire, but the dealership sent her family clothes and gift cards after the incident. Heartland RV reached out to her asking for more information, including photos and videos of the fire, but Doman said she wants to talk to an attorney before responding to the manufacturer.

Months after the fire, her husband was still waking up in the middle of the night. Her teenage son was having nightmares. Even the presence of a propane tank at their house scares her now.

One time, her neighbor was burning a huge pile of garbage, and just the smell of smoke made her panic.

	<p>The family has decided not to get another RV, at least not for a while.</p> <p>"I've never been so terrified in my entire life," Doman said. "I could've lost everything in a matter of minutes."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Deer-hitting season in full effect in WA
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3679620/stay-safe-night-drivers-deer-hitting-season-full-effect-throughout-wa/
GIST	<p>The possibility of Washington drivers hitting a deer at night during this time of year is more likely than you think, as Washington drivers have a 1-in-200 chance of hitting a deer, according to a 2021 consumer report.</p> <p>PEMCO spokesperson Allison Leep said this is the time of year when deer migrate from higher habitats to lower areas. Because of this, deer are closer to main roads, which can cause accidents.</p> <p>“This is the time of year when half to two-thirds of all deer collisions occur,” Leep said.</p> <p>She said the average damage to a vehicle after hitting a deer is around \$4,000. A minimum of 5,000 deer collisions occur in Washington each year.</p> <p>Washington is currently in deer mating (and hunting) season, which can also be a factor in more collisions with cars. During mating season for a buck, everything done around this time is aimed at one goal: Maximize the chances of finding a doe, according to the Auburn University Deer Lab. This is the time of year when testosterone levels reach their climax, as bucks are driven to maximize their reproductive output.</p> <p>This leads bucks to be more aggressive in their pursuit, meaning they take to roads and highways more frequently.</p> <p>“It’s all hormonal changes that make them less risk-averse and more active,” said Dalton, a hunter based in Texas who has spent multiple hunting seasons in the Pacific Northwest. “Collisions could also be due to more people on the road when it is dark and deer are active since it starts getting dark around the time when people are coming home from work. They’re crepuscular, so they are most active at dawn and dusk.”</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	10/20 Charges: 7 China nationals repatriate plot
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/21/us-charge-seven-over-alleged-beijing-plot-to-forcibly-repatriate-elite-chinese
GIST	<p>The United States has charged seven Chinese nationals it accuses of waging a surveillance and harassment campaign against a US resident and his family as part of a bid by Beijing to forcibly repatriate one of them back to China.</p> <p>The eight-count indictment, unsealed on Thursday in a US district court in Brooklyn, New York, is the latest case by the justice department targeting China’s global overseas campaign, known as “Operation Fox Hunt”.</p> <p>“As alleged, the defendants engaged in a unilateral and uncoordinated law enforcement action on US soil on behalf of the government of the People’s Republic of China, in an effort to cause the forced repatriation of a US resident to China,” said Breon Peace, United States attorney for the Eastern District of New York.</p>

“The United States will firmly counter such outrageous violations of national sovereignty and prosecute individuals who act as illegal agents of foreign states.”

Michael Driscoll, the FBI’s assistant director in charge in the New York office, said: “The victims in this case sought to flee an authoritarian government, leaving behind their lives and family, for a better life here. That same government sent agents to the United States to harass, threaten, and forcibly return them to the People’s Republic of China.”

The seven individuals charged are Quanzhong An, 55, of Roslyn, New York, his daughter Guangyang An, 34, and five others still in China: Tian Peng, Chenghua Chen, Chunde Ming, Xuexin Hou, and Weidong Yuan.

The lead defendant, Quanzhong An, and his daughter were arrested on Thursday morning. The rest of the defendants remain at large. The US does not have an extradition treaty with China.

According to the indictment, Quanzhong An is accused of working at the behest of China’s Provincial Commission for Discipline Inspection to harass and intimidate a Chinese man and his son living in the US. The man and his son are identified only as John Doe-1 and John Doe-2.

As part of the plot, the defendants allegedly coerced a relative of the family, identified as John Doe 3, to travel from China to the United States in a bid to convince John Doe-1 to return to the country.

At a meeting in a restaurant in September 2018, the relative explained to John Doe-2 that he had been forced to travel there by the government as part of a plan to repatriate the 100 most wanted fugitives, the indictment alleged. John Doe-1 was told the “leadership in China would like to encourage the elite overseas Chinese to return”.

Other examples of harassment the family endured included a letter-writing campaign, with one letter warning that “coming back and turning yourself in is the only way out”.

The Chinese government also filed a lawsuit against the father and son in a New York state court, claiming the father had stolen money from a Chinese employer and his son illegally profited from the scheme.

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HEADLINE	10/20 Maryland reviews 100 police custody deaths
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/20/us/maryland-autopsy-medical-examiner-review.html
GIST	<p>In 2021, the world watched as Dr. David R. Fowler, one of the country’s top forensic pathologists and the former chief medical examiner of Maryland, testified in a Minneapolis courtroom. He said that a police officer’s knee had not caused the death of George Floyd, who had been pinned down on the street by three officers for more than nine minutes as his cries for help subsided into silence.</p> <p>Rather, Dr. Fowler blamed Mr. Floyd’s pre-existing medical conditions, drug use and even, he theorized, emissions from the squad car’s tailpipe as factors in his demise.</p> <p>Dr. Fowler’s assertions in defense of the officer on trial, Derek Chauvin, were roundly rejected by the jury, which pronounced Mr. Chauvin guilty of murder. They also caused a round of soul-searching in Maryland, where new questions were raised about dozens of deaths in police custody that were investigated during Dr. Fowler’s 17-year tenure.</p> <p>More than 400 medical experts signed an open letter contending that Dr. Fowler’s testimony in the Chauvin case had revealed “obvious bias” and raised “malpractice concerns” about how his office had handled similar cases.</p> <p>State officials announced this week that experts will now review the autopsy files of about 100 people who died in law enforcement custody to see if medical examiners exhibited racial bias or were slanted in favor</p>

of law enforcement. State Attorney General Brian Frosh said the review could lead to changes in how the state handles forensic death investigations.

Asked if it could also lead to criminal charges against police officers, a spokeswoman for Mr. Frosh said the question was “far too speculative at this point.” Any such decision would most likely fall to individual prosecutors.

The review is at least a partial vindication for families who have long blamed the state medical examiner for failing to hold law enforcement officers accountable for deaths in their custody. The medical examiner’s office attributed [the death of Anton Black](#), a 19-year-old athlete who was chased and pinned down for more than six minutes, to congenital heart abnormalities — even though his parents said there had never been any sign of such problems in the many physicals that Mr. Black had been required to take for track and football teams.

Mr. Black’s family received a \$5 million settlement in a case against the three police departments whose members were involved in his arrest, but the family and a coalition of supporters have also taken the unusual step of suing the state medical examiner’s office, the pathologist who conducted the death investigation and Dr. Fowler.

“There are families that for years and years and years were saying the medical examiner got it wrong, to anyone who would listen,” said Sonia Kumar, a senior staff lawyer at the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland, which is assisting with the case and applauded the state review. “If we’re not able to tell the truth about those deaths, we can’t prevent the tragedy from reoccurring.”

Many deaths involving law enforcement have clear-cut causes: a prison inmate dies of cancer, or the police fatally shoot a suspect. But deaths involving restraint, like the facedown hold to which Mr. Floyd was subjected, are among the most contested cases dealt with by medical examiners. The primary legal issue in the murder case against Mr. Chauvin, the officer who knelt on Mr. Floyd’s neck, was whether that action was what killed Mr. Floyd.

Time and again, deaths that occur during or after restraint have been attributed to other factors like drug use, heart conditions, and a constellation of symptoms known as excited delirium, which the company that makes Tasers has long put forth as an alternative to blaming their stun guns for in-custody deaths.

Last year, the American Medical Association [rejected the use of excited delirium](#) as a diagnosis, saying it was “disproportionately cited in cases where Black men die in law enforcement custody.”

Most experts agree that restraint, particularly hogtying and other forms of facedown restraint, can cause death by restricting oxygen intake, even when the subject of the force is still [able to speak](#).

But some medical examiners have relied heavily on a series of studies by researchers in San Diego that found that prone restraint is not life-threatening. The studies have been discredited by many experts because they excluded subjects who were obese, drug users, mentally ill or suffered from a variety of medical conditions — all factors that could cause police restraint to become potentially lethal — and otherwise [failed to replicate the real-world conditions](#) of pursuit and arrest.

In Maryland, a committee made up of forensic pathologists as well as some of the leading critics of bias in forensic science was asked last year to determine which of the 1,300 in-custody death cases handled when Dr. Fowler oversaw the department should be reviewed, and how. It has identified 100 cases where police restraint may have played a role in a death.

Independent experts will now review the files to see if they agree with the cause of death, whether the opinion was based on an adequate investigation and whether the practices of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner need to be changed.

	In particular, the investigators will look at what steps the original death investigators took to determine the nature, duration and severity of the restraint, and whether they followed a standard known as the “but for” rule in determining a cause of death. The rule says that even in cases with multiple contributing factors, the medical examiner must determine whether the subject would have died had it not been for the restraint.
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HEADLINE	10/20 Mystery of deadly attack at Myanmar prison
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/20/world/asia/myanmar-prison-attack.html
GIST	<p>Myanmar’s military regime and its rival, the pro-democracy National Unity Government, both said Thursday that they were investigating two explosions and gunfire at Insein Prison that killed eight and injured 18, mostly civilians.</p> <p>The unprecedented attack Wednesday at the notorious prison, where hundreds of political prisoners are being held, took place at a building where family members deliver packages for inmates and lawyers and witnesses are processed to enter the prison for court hearings.</p> <p>Immediately after the explosions, gunfire erupted from a prison watchtower, according to witnesses, who said that it caused some of the deaths and injuries.</p> <p>Spokesmen for the military junta and the unity government each told a different version of how the carnage occurred. U Kyaw Zaw, a spokesman for the shadow unity government, agreed that some of the victims had been shot and killed. However, Gen. Zaw Min Tun, a junta spokesman, said that forensic examination of the victims showed that all the injuries were caused by bomb fragments.</p> <p>Most of the victims were civilians who had come to deliver parcels. Among the dead were three prison guards, the 10-year-old daughter of a prisoner, and the mother of a prominent student activist.</p> <p>A little-known organization calling itself the Special Task Agency of Burma claimed responsibility for the Insein Prison bombing. The group describes itself as “urban warriors who are fighting to the end to root out the military dictatorship.” It says it is not affiliated with any political organization.</p> <p>The Special Task Agency also claimed credit in August for killing two immigration officers in an attack on an office in Yangon, Myanmar’s largest city.</p> <p>The authorities said that one bomb exploded inside the parcel office and another just outside. It was unclear how the bombs had been smuggled into the high-security prison. They would have had to go through a security screening to reach the parcel delivery office, and the person carrying them would have had to provide personal information to register.</p> <p>Assassinations, guerrilla attacks and armed clashes between the military and rebel forces have become common in Myanmar since top generals seized power in a coup 21 months ago. Last month, a retired brigadier general and diplomat who supported the junta, U Ohn Thwin, 72, was shot dead outside his house by local guerrillas.</p> <p>Soldiers and the police have killed more than 2,300 civilians and arrested nearly 16,000. Of these, 12,700 remain incarcerated in the country’s vast prison network, many sentenced to long prison terms for opposing the regime. Among them is the ousted civilian leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been sentenced to 26 years so far and faces more charges.</p> <p>The shadow unity government, which is made up of ethnic leaders and elected officials who escaped arrest, has formed the People’s Defense Force with more than 60,000 fighters to wage what it calls a revolutionary war against the junta. Semiautonomous local resistance groups with a similar number of fighters also have sprung up around the country.</p> <p>In a statement Wednesday, the unity government distanced itself from the prison bombing and said the attack violated its code of conduct, which prohibits rebel forces from targeting civilians.</p>

	<p>“It is a matter of the deepest sorrow to the National Unity Government that the mother and family members of some of the political prisoners and other civilians were killed during this bombing and explosion,” the statement said.</p> <p>Mr. Kyaw Zaw, the unity government spokesman, said Thursday that the bombing was not carried out by its forces.</p> <p>“The revolutionary forces would not do this, as they have been specifically instructed not to harm the civilian population,” he said.</p> <p>The bombs smuggled into Insein Prison, on the outskirts of Yangon, were disguised as food packages, junta-backed news media reported.</p> <p>Food packages delivered by family members are important to inmates, whose prison fare is substandard. In-person family visits have been banned since 2020, when Covid-19 restrictions were imposed, and have not been reinstated by the regime except in rare cases.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Raleigh: trail of victims, well-armed suspect
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/20/us/raleigh-shooting-police-report.html
GIST	<p>The calls to the authorities in Raleigh, N.C., started coming in at 5:09 p.m. on Oct. 13: A young man was stalking through a quiet neighborhood, clad in camouflage. He carried a shotgun, with a handgun in his waistband and a hunting knife hooked to his belt.</p> <p>The callers reported that he was shooting people he encountered on his path, leaving victims gravely wounded in a car, in a driveway, on a front porch and along a nearby walking path. Later, officers discovered another victim inside a home: a 16-year-old boy who had been fatally shot and stabbed. The suspect, 15, was critically injured after a shootout with the police.</p> <p>The Raleigh Police Department released a preliminary report on Thursday that provides the fullest narrative yet from investigators on the attacks that left five people dead, two injured and a community rattled by a staggering burst of violence.</p> <p>The document, a memo submitted to city leaders by Chief Estella Patterson of the Raleigh Police Department, shared the chilling details of how the attacks unfolded but did not answer a number of crucial questions, including the motive for the attack.</p> <p>The disclosure comes as Raleigh continues to navigate the aftermath of the shooting; a vigil will be held in the heart of the city on Sunday.</p> <p>The authorities have not disclosed the name of the suspect, noting that he is a juvenile. But on Tuesday, his parents released a statement identifying him. “Our son Austin inflicted immeasurable pain on the Raleigh community,” the parents, Alan and Elise Thompson, said in the statement.</p> <p>Mr. Thompson’s parents said they were overwhelmed with grief and concern for the families of the victims, including the two who survived the attack. They acknowledged the anguish others were grappling with and how they were facing it themselves; their son James, they noted, was among the dead. In his obituary, James Thompson, who was a junior at Knightdale High School, was remembered for his passion for deep-sea fishing and playing basketball in a Christian sports league.</p> <p>“We have so many unanswered questions,” Mr. Thompson’s parents said in the statement. “There were never any indications or warning signs that Austin was capable of doing anything like this. Our family will continue to cooperate fully with law enforcement officials and do whatever we can to help them understand why and how this happened.”</p>

Investigators were still trying to piece together why the suspect carried out the rampage. The police report said that there seemed to be no connection between the victims other than the fact that they lived in the same neighborhood.

The suspect, who remains hospitalized in critical condition, has not been charged yet. But prosecutors in Wake County, which includes Raleigh, have indicated that if he survives, they plan to charge him as an adult.

Lorrin Freeman, the Wake County district attorney, said last week that her office had filed petitions in juvenile court for a probable cause hearing, which should be held soon. If probable cause is found to exist, her office will ask that the case be transferred to superior court.

A separate inquiry is underway by the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation to examine the use of force by Raleigh police officers who opened fire on Mr. Thompson. Those officers are on administrative duty, as their department's policy dictates, officials said.

Shortly after 5 p.m. on Oct. 13, officers responded to a call reporting the sound of gunfire near a golf course in Hedingham, a neighborhood northeast of downtown Raleigh with rows of duplexes and winding walking trails along the Neuse River.

When officers arrived, they found Marcille Gardner, 59, lying in a driveway of a residence and Nicole Connors, 52, on the front porch. Ms. Connors's dog was fatally shot as well. Both women were taken to a hospital, where Ms. Gardner remains in critical but stable condition. Ms. Connors, who was remembered by neighbors for her constant smile as she walked her dog, did not survive.

Then, a few blocks away, the authorities found Gabriel Torres, an off-duty Raleigh police officer about to leave home for work, in his car with gunshot wounds. Officer Torres, 29, died later at a hospital.

A witness shared with the police a photograph of the suspect dressed in camouflage, and they believed he was making his way to the Neuse River Greenway Trail.

At 5:21 p.m., just 12 minutes after the initial calls to the police, they received another call reporting two more victims, both found along the greenway. The victims were identified as Mary Marshall, a 34-year-old two weeks away from her wedding, who was walking her dog; and Susan Karnatz, a 49-year-old who most people knew as Sue, who was out for a run. Her family said that Ms. Karnatz, who had run marathons, had treasured having time in the sun and fresh air as part of her routine.

Both women died at the scene.

The police began a sprawling manhunt. They urged residents in the area to stay at home, or away from the Hedingham neighborhood. Schools and assisted living facilities were locked down. Officers from an array of local, state and federal law enforcement agencies, as well as search dogs, were fanning out in pursuit.

At 6:42 p.m., officers found Mr. Thompson on a property that had what investigators described as two barnlike structures. Mr. Thompson fired at the officers from one of the buildings, the authorities said. At 6:44 p.m., one officer, Casey Clark, fell to the ground after he was hit. (Officer Clark was treated at a hospital and released.) Other officers fired back toward the building. Approximately 23 rounds were fired by officers, according to the police report.

The police then surrounded the building, containing Mr. Thompson inside. Officers repeatedly told him to come out and surrender his weapons, according to the report. He did not.

At 9:34 p.m., officers in tactical gear went into the building and found Mr. Thompson on the ground with a single gunshot wound. At 9:36 p.m., officers handcuffed him and he was taken to a hospital. In his backpack, investigators found different kinds of shotgun and rifle ammunition. A shotgun and spent shells were next to him on the ground.

HEADLINE	10/20 Tacoma violent crime: past, present
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/army-ranger-veteran-remembers-defending-his-home-against-alleged-gang-attack-in-tacoma-shootout
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. - In 1989, a group of Army Rangers, along with their neighbors, bunkered down in a home on South Ash Street in Tacoma and defended themselves from an onslaught of gunfire from alleged gang members.</p> <p>Tacoma is seeing an increase in violent crime. So far this year, there have been 39 homicides (including 3 police shootings). This is the most homicides the city has ever seen.</p> <p>However, violent crime also plagued Tacoma decades ago in the late 80s and 90s.</p> <p>"The neighborhood just kept getting progressively worse, and for me, deploy and come back and then see how much worse it had gotten in that short period of time and how they were harassing the neighbors. Like, these guys were trying to take over the neighborhood," said Bill Foulk.</p> <p>In 1987, Foulk made the decision to lay down roots in the city of Tacoma.</p> <p>At the time, Foulk was a Sergeant with the Army Rangers. He purchased a home along South Ash Street. "When I bought this house, it was condemned: no windows, no doors, no wiring, no plumbing, nothing. I wanted a fixer-upper," he said.</p> <p>Foulk put time and energy into making the condemned building his home, as well as making Ash Street his community.</p> <p>However, in 1989, Foulk says drugs and gangs infested his street.</p> <p>He says nothing was being done to stop the criminal activity that was now infiltrating his neighborhood.</p> <p>"Unfortunately, there was little the police could do. I mean we'd have like, I can remember in July, we had a gang related shooting, Crips and Blood, a shooting on the street out here," he said. "And typically you would call the police and no one would ever show up," Foulk added.</p> <p>Foulk says he and his neighbors took action.</p> <p>He says they started taking pictures of criminal activity, writing down license plate numbers, and on September 23, 1987, Foulk organized a cookout at his house in an effort to get attention on the criminal issues on the street.</p> <p>"We start, like, three in the afternoon. All the good neighborhood families came. They brought their kids. We're cooking burgers. You know, just having a great neighborhood bbq. Then, we started getting harassed by those guys across the street," said Foulk.</p> <p>Foulk said the group was throwing things like bottles and fruit at the people at his cookout.</p> <p>He says he, and several of his Army Ranger friends walked across the street and told the group to leave the neighbors alone.</p> <p>However, instead of backing down Foulk says the group threatened to burn down his home and shoot him.</p> <p>"By 6:30, a guy comes rolling down the street and fires a shot into the air, like that's the warning short," said Foulk.</p>

Foulk says with a house full of guests, including families, he realized trouble might be coming. So he called the base.

"Hey, this is Sergeant Foulk. I'm at home. I'm about to come under attack and I need every available Ranger at my house now," he said.

Foulk tells FOX 13 News about 15 Army Rangers showed up at his house, joining the ranks of his neighbors who decided to stay to defend the home.

Foulk says they began to prepare for an attack, which he says came in like a blitzkrieg.

"It was like being on a military firing range when somebody says commence fire. And just all of a sudden, it was pow pow pow, gunfire from every direction. You could hear bullets hitting the house," he said.

In total at least 300 rounds fired.

Foulk says the majority of the shooting came from the alleged gang members

According to reports from 30 years ago, no one was injured in the shooting. However, Foulk says several attackers were hit.

"If a gang member got shot, they didn't lay around waiting for EMS. Their gang buddies took them away. Wherever, whatever they did with them," he said.

Eventually, police arrived, and the scene was cleared.

According to reports, two alleged gang members were arrested, but no charges were filed against Foulk or any of his friends.

"We were told by the police and others that we were legally right in what we did. We defended ourselves from a heinous crime, and there's nothing wrong with the way went down. And it's not like they didn't have a whole load of witness to say, 'this is exactly how it what happened,' because there was 30 people here to tell the same story," he said.

Thirty years later, Foulk still lives in the same home. There is even a scar from the battle, a bullet hole that was intentionally left as a reminder of the day.

"It was a wakeup call for politicians, and for the administration in the police department," he said.

Change eventually came to Tacoma, and the violence subsided. However, in the last few years the deadly crime is returning. Over the last few years, homicides have been increasing.

- 2017: 12
- 2018: 18
- 2019: 23
- 2020: 31
- 2021: 34
- 2022: 39 (including 3 police shootings)

In comparison to 2017, there has been more than a 200% increase in homicides in 2022.

"It's out of control, and I think that, you know, I think that the political environment is exactly the same as it is back, you know, in the late 80s. Where, you know, they don't want to deal with the problem. They don't want to talk about it. They don't even want to deal with it. They don't even want to admit that there's a problem. They just thinking, like, hoping that it is going to go away, and it's not going to go away. It's only going to get worse," he said.

	<p>A 29-year-old woman was shot while inside her Tacoma home during a drive-by shooting, making her the fourth person</p> <p>FOX 13 News reached out to the city of Tacoma regarding the increase in crime. They responded with this statement from the mayor:</p> <p><i>"Like many in our community, I am troubled and frustrated by violent incidents in Tacoma. Incidents like these cause ripples of trauma that affect the families of those involved, our first responders, and the community at large, and we are taking steps to address these impacts. Along with implementation of our Violent Crime Reduction Plan, we are increasing funding to our intervention programs, and working with our community to identify and address the underlying conditions that contribute to violent crime throughout Tacoma. Though we are 'winning some days' as my Chief would say, and the data is showing some positive progress in lowering violent crime, if our residents do not feel safe then we have not met our community's needs. We need to create a community where every individual feels safe in Tacoma. Chief Moore will provide a comprehensive update on the Violent Crime Reduction Plan <u>on November 1st at noon</u>, and I invite you to tune in then."</i></p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 North Spokane businesses face crime rise
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/north-spokane-businesses-seeing-uptick-crime/293-2cdd2fea-ba60-4674-81a1-ff608a1164ba
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — Rachel Gano and her husband opened Fluffy's Candy store in north Spokane as a fun, business venture.</p> <p>"We were sitting in church one day and the sermon was 'Are you not doing something because you're afraid?,' Gano said. "And so that's how it started. We just wanted to create a fun place for people to come."</p> <p>But, in early September, the couple reported their business, founded on fun, had been burglarized.</p> <p>"They had thrown a large rock, probably a good 10-pound rock through the bottom half of one of the windows. So, it just shattered it, so they probably just reached in, unlocked the door and let themselves in," Gano said.</p> <p>Gano said the burglar stole her cash box and caused thousands of dollars worth of damage, but she said money isn't what she's most upset about losing.</p> <p>"We also own a donut shop and have seven kids," Gano said. "So, we're constantly running. So, it's not so much the money, it's the time involved. Time talking to the police officers, having to be closed, having your windows boarded up. Just the comments, the questions is really the heart ache for us."</p> <p>In early October, another business just a few doors down on Holland Ave. reported a burglary too. Spokane police said nine burglaries have been reported since August 1 in the area.</p> <p>Gano said she believes the increase of crime in her neighborhood could be linked to Spokane's population growth.</p> <p>"I don't believe its common, but I think it's becoming more common," Gano said. "Just with the influx of new residents and just people to Spokane in general."</p> <p>But, despite the heart ache she says she felt in the moment, she is able to reflect on the situation with a positive outlook.</p> <p>"I mean, it makes you angry that people do it, but what are you going to do? It's out of your control at that point," Gano said. "Only thing you can control is your emotion."</p>

	<p>Since the attack, Gano said she has extended her security camera hours. At the time of the burglary, she said her cameras were turned off.</p> <p>SPD said it is working with Fluffy's on finding any involved suspects.</p> <p>Julie Humphreys with the department said police are aware of these cases and one arrest has already been made.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Police probe acts of violence South Seattle
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/police-investigating-multiple-recent-acts-of-violence-in-south-seattle-central-district#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — Seattle police are investigating several violent incidents that have happened in South Seattle and the Central District this week. At this time, the incidents are not connected, but police are continuing to investigate.</p> <p>On Thursday, police arrested a suspect accused of killing a prominent member of the Central District community.</p> <p>D'Vonne Pickett, Jr., was shot and killed Wednesday evening near his business off of East Union St. and MLK Jr. Way. Family and friends of Pickett said in addition to being a business owner in the community, he was also a father of three, little league coach and friend.</p> <p>"I'm sad to hear that this guy, this businessman, this entrepreneur, this taxpaying man, who created jobs in our community and is an icon, lost his life so senselessly," said Dr. Jeffrey Perkins, who visited Pickett's memorial Thursday. "Now it's getting to the point that we won't have nothing in our neighborhood for the little man because it's dangerous everywhere and that's what's going to have to get addressed."</p> <p>Around 12:30 p.m. Thursday, police arrested a suspect connected to Pickett's killing and said that suspect may be connected to another homicide and other shooting investigations in the area. A lack of evidence is keeping police from saying exactly which cases could be connected, according to a spokesperson for the Seattle Police Department (SPD).</p> <p>Meanwhile, police have yet to release suspect information about other cases that were part of a violent week in the city.</p> <p>Officers first responded to an attempted robbery-turned-shooting at a store near the Columbia City neighborhood around noon Monday. A 56-year-old employee of the store was shot and taken to the hospital in serious condition.</p> <p>Then, a 50-year-old man was shot in the neck in his own Rainier Beach home around 10 p.m. Monday. Police said evidence suggests someone shot through a window.</p> <p>As of Thursday night, an SPD detective told KOMO News there is no reason to believe there is an outstanding serial shooter or robber, but said they cannot connect these cases to the Wednesday homicide.</p> <p>In the Central District, some want more action from the city to address the recent acts of gun violence.</p> <p>"Fund more police," Perkins exclaimed. "Clean up this drug activity, this gangster land imposed upon us." Police have not released the suspect's name or motive for the shooting that took the life of Pickett in the Central District.</p> <p>KOMO News is awaiting more details about the other two shootings in South Seattle as well.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/19 Homicide rates of major cities for 2021
SOURCE	https://time.com/6223217/homicide-rates-us-cities-2021/
GIST	<p>Detroit was one of the most violent major cities in America in 2021, even though the city's homicides dropped 4% from 2020. "We are not in any way celebrating these numbers," Detroit Police Chief James White said earlier this year. "These reductions illustrate the value of our efforts together as a collaboration during an unprecedented time in history."</p> <p>Nearly 300 miles west of Detroit, Milwaukee had a record year of killings in 2021, continuing the upward trend that started for them in 2020. "I don't think it's even a subject of debate anymore that lower-income communities took a harder hit from COVID and the impact that had on gun violence and homicides," Jeff Flemmings, the Communications Director for Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, says.</p> <p>Memphis also struggled significantly with homicides in 2021, breaking the record the city set in 2020. "I think it's going to take more than just the police department. It will take more than just the mayor. It's going to take all of us," Pastor Walter Womack, a Memphis community leader, told NBC WMC-TV in Memphis in 2021.</p> <p>According to FBI crime data, in 2021 these three cities had some of the highest homicide rates in the country.</p> <p>The FBI's 2021 crime data, released Oct. 5, offers an incomplete picture of crime data nationwide—an estimated 40% of police agencies, including police in New York City and Los Angeles, did not report data because of a change in the system the FBI uses to record crime stats. As a result, the FBI had to estimate national crime figures for 2021, with questionable results.</p> <p>For instance, the FBI estimated there were between 21,300 and 24,600 homicides in the U.S. last year. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported nearly 26,000 homicides in 2021.</p> <p>However, for cities that did report crime data to the FBI, homicide figures can provide a useful window into the level of violence.</p> <p>"Homicides are probably the most reliable data point," Thomas Abt, a criminal justice researcher and a senior fellow with the Council on Criminal Justice, says. "We're all in agreement on homicides, not just based on FBI data but on other sources as well."</p> <p>It's important to note that most homicides (80%) were committed with firearms, continuing the surge in gun violence that's happened since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Here is the FBI's 2021 homicide data for the largest cities in the country. Not every major city had complete crime stats for 2021; of the 50 most populous cities in the U.S., 18 reported no crime data, or had only partial crime data available. Those cities were excluded from the list.</p> <p>Homicide stats for America's biggest cities</p> <p>Memphis, Tenn. 306 homicides. The homicide rate was 48.7 per 100,000.</p> <p>Detroit 303 homicides. The homicide rate was 47.9 per 100,000.</p> <p>Milwaukee, Wis. 195 homicides. The homicide rate was 34.3 per 100,000.</p> <p>Atlanta</p>

159 homicides. The homicide rate was 32 per 100,000.

Kansas City, Mo.

156 homicides. The homicide rate was 30.7 per 100,000.

Louisville, Ky.

192 homicides. The homicide rate was 30.5 per 100,000.

Indianapolis

239 homicides. The murder rate was 27.1 per 100,000.

Las Vegas

152 homicides. The homicide rate was 23.5 per 100,000.

Columbus, Ohio

203 homicides. The homicide rate was 22.4 per 100,000.

Minneapolis

94 homicides. The homicide rate was 22.1 per 100,000.

Albuquerque, N.M.

120 homicides. The homicide rate was 21.3 per 100,000.

Houston

464 homicides. The homicide rate was 20.3 per 100,000.

Dallas

212 homicides. The homicide rate was 16.5 per 100,000.

Nashville, Tenn.

99 homicides. The homicide rate was 14.6 per 100,000.

Tulsa, Okla.

59 homicides. The homicide rate was 14.3 per 100,000.

Denver

100 homicides. The homicide rate was 14.1 per 100,000.

Portland, Ore.

83 homicides. The homicide rate was 12.9 per 100,000.

Fort Worth, Texas

118 homicides. The homicide rate was 12.6 per 100,000.

Oklahoma City

82 homicides. The homicide rate was 11.9 per 100,000.

San Antonio, Texas

168 homicides. The homicide rate was 11.6 per 100,000.

Charlotte, N.C.

98 homicides. The homicide rate was 11.1 per 100,000.

Austin, Texas

79 homicides. The homicide rate was 8.2 per 100,000.

Colorado Springs, Colo.

38 homicides. The homicide rate was 7.9 per 100,000.

Wichita, Kan.

23 homicides. The homicide rate was 5.8 per 100,000.

Seattle

41 homicides. The homicide rate was 5.6 per 100,000.

Boston

36 homicides. The homicide rate was 5.5 per 100,000.

Raleigh, N.C.

26 homicides. The homicide rate was 5.5 per 100,000.

Mesa, Ariz.

25 homicides. The homicide rate was 4.9 per 100,000.

Arlington, Texas

19 homicides. The homicide rate was 4.8 per 100,000.

San Diego

63 homicides. The homicide rate was 4.6 per 100,000.

El Paso, Texas

30 homicides. The homicide rate was 4.4 per 100,000.

Virginia Beach, Va.

14 homicides. The homicide rate was 3.1 per 100,000.

The following major cities did not report data to the FBI, or did not report data for the full year:

- Bakersfield, Calif.
- Baltimore
- Chicago
- Fresno, Calif.
- Jacksonville, Fla.
- Long Beach, Calif.
- Los Angeles
- Miami
- New York City
- Oakland, Calif.
- Omaha, Neb.
- Philadelphia
- Phoenix
- Sacramento, Calif.
- San Francisco
- San Jose, Calif.
- Tucson, Ariz.
- Washington, D.C.

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Read more: [Homicides Continued to Increase in 2021, According to the FBI's Flawed Crime Report](#)

HEADLINE	10/20 New details on Uvalde shooting response
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/20/us/texas-uvalde-dps-investigation-betancourt/index.html
GIST	A Texas state police captain tried to delay a law enforcement team entering the classrooms to end the Robb Elementary massacre and is now among those under investigation after an account from someone

at the scene that he ordered his officers to stay out of the school in the initial response to the shooting, sources tell CNN.

CNN has obtained a new audio recording of Capt. Joel Betancourt ordering a strike team to wait, more than 70 minutes into the attack. Betancourt says he thought a more highly skilled team was on its way. Separately, police memos highlight criticism of Betancourt, a 15-year veteran of the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS).

Memos written just two days after the May 24 massacre and reviewed by CNN detail some of the DPS involvement in the [hesitant but chaotic law enforcement response](#) to the shooting in Uvalde, Texas. No action was taken against the gunman or to help those trapped with him for 77 minutes apart from an initial approach that was aborted when he started firing. [Nineteen children and two teachers](#) were killed in the massacre.

“I heard someone shout out, Capt. Betancourt said all DPS personnel need to be on perimeter, do no (sic) enter building,” one DPS lieutenant stated, after writing how he had driven from some 40 miles away at speeds of up to 130 mph to get to the scene.

A DPS sergeant added in his memo: “As this was clearly against established training, we both decided to enter the building where the shooter was located.”

DPS director Col. Steven McCraw told CNN, “Yes, absolutely,” when asked if Betancourt was being investigated for telling officers not to go into the hallway. “The IG is investigating that,” [McCraw said during an impromptu interview](#) before a meeting last month.

Betancourt was interviewed multiple times in the immediate aftermath of the event and has since become one of seven current and former DPS officers referred for further investigation by the DPS inspector general, CNN has learned from sources close to the events who are not authorized to speak to the media.

He told investigators he arrived at Robb Elementary at about 12:45 p.m., a few minutes before the teenage gunman was killed, the sources said.

“Hey, this is DPS Captain Betancourt. The team that’s going to make breach needs to stand by. The team that’s gonna breach needs to stand by,” he ordered at 12:48 p.m. on May 24, as heard on the audio from a police radio broadcast captured on multiple officers’ body-worn cameras.

In the course of the investigation, Betancourt told investigators he had no first-hand knowledge of what was going on, including that a specialized Border Patrol tactical unit, BORTAC, was confronting the shooter, according to sources familiar with the investigation. He said he issued the order for the team to stand by as he thought a better unit was on its way, sources said.

He told agents no one responded to or followed his order, the sources said.

The memos reviewed by CNN and the audio offer evidence that contradicts the official DPS narrative that its officers were never in control or issuing substantive orders. DPS director McCraw has repeatedly criticized then-school district police chief Pedro “Pete” Arredondo as [leading the “abject failure” of a response](#). Arredondo has said that he did not see himself as the incident commander.

CNN left messages for Betancourt on phone, email and text. He did not respond.

Betancourt remains on active duty with DPS.

DPS declined to comment on this story.

Two officers have given accounts of the initial response to the shooting in which they were told not to enter the school. The officers did not say in their memos when they received that message. Betancourt did tell investigators he remembers telling DPS officers to stay out and form a perimeter, but says that was after he arrived and was told by Uvalde Sheriff Ruben Nolasco there were too many people inside, according to the sources. Nolasco has not responded to CNN's requests for comment.

The names of [the DPS officers under investigation](#) have not been publicly released. Betancourt's involvement has been confirmed to CNN by McCraw and other sources. Another of the seven, Crimson Elizondo, left DPS to work for the Uvalde school district this summer and was fired [after CNN revealed what she said and did](#) on the day of the massacre.

First alerted to the shooting

Betancourt, the most senior officer known to be being investigated over the failed law enforcement response, told investigators he had little to do with the operation at Robb Elementary until after the gunman was killed, sources close to the inquiry told CNN.

The interviews from the immediate days after the event, described to CNN by several sources, offer the first direct accounts from the officers now being scrutinized by the inspector general.

Betancourt told investigators he had a clear memory of being in Eagle Pass, Texas, with other officers when the first call of a shooting came in at about 11:50 a.m., he said, but it was unclear how major the situation was. As details became available, they left, Betancourt driving the 60 miles to Uvalde alone and stopping to get gas, he said.

Betancourt told agents he had no body camera or dash cam recording him, according to the sources. He said he spoke to Nolasco, the Uvalde sheriff, on the phone while he drove and heard a gunman was barricaded in the school with "an AK47," the sources said.

Betancourt told investigators he arrived at about 12:45 p.m. and he first assumed Nolasco was the on-scene commander as he was there outside the school.

Later, when he saw school district police chief Arredondo inside after the gunman was killed and talked to him, he told investigators he then thought Arredondo was in charge. Arredondo [was fired by the Uvalde school board](#) in August, and he has argued he should be reinstated.

Betancourt was asked if he talked with anyone about why entry was not being made to the classrooms and he said he did not, sources told CNN, remembering only that there was talk about negotiating with the shooter.

He said to investigators he issued the order to "stand by" based on information from Nolasco and thinking there was a better SWAT team still heading to the school, sources said.

After the teenage gunman [was killed by the BORTAC team](#), Betancourt said he focused on clearing the crime scene and setting up a command post. He told investigators how he used FaceTime to show his superiors the state of the school after the carnage, the sources familiar with the interviews said.

In a follow-up interview, he said he did not know there were any children in the building until after the breach, CNN was told.

Early texts from Betancourt about attack

At least two officers said it was Betancourt who alerted them to the ongoing attack at Robb Elementary, the sources familiar with the investigation told CNN.

A sergeant said he had received a text about an "active shooter" incident from Betancourt at about 11:37 a.m., raising questions about Betancourt's claim that he only became involved later.

	<p>And Victor Escalon, the regional DPS director for the South Texas Region that includes Uvalde, said Betancourt had texted him at 12:09 p.m.. That text read: "Initial info one person possibly a teacher shot in head, one officer shot, kid has AK 47, CNU [specialist negotiator team] has been activated, suspect is barricaded. Troopers who are medics have been deployed. Drone team is on its way," the sources said.</p> <p>McCraw and other DPS leaders have refused to discuss the internal investigations or release information until the investigations are complete at the request of local District Attorney Christina Mitchell Busbee. Her criminal investigation may take years and she has said she will charge anyone who has committed a crime at Robb Elementary, including law enforcement officers.</p> <p>CNN is in a coalition of news organizations suing the DPS for records relating to the investigation, including the radio transmissions and body camera footage mentioned in this story, that have been withheld from the media and public.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Supreme Court 2 security incidents in 1hr.
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/supreme-court-two-security-incidents/
GIST	<p>There were two security incidents at the U.S. Supreme Court in the same hour Wednesday, CBS News has learned.</p> <p>Minutes before guns were seized from a Georgia man's van near the Supreme Court complex Wednesday afternoon, a California man was arrested for claiming he had "higher authority" and attempting to unlawfully enter the high court's north door.</p> <p>According to newly filed court documents obtained by CBS News, Melvin Marbrey, 73, told Supreme Court police he was at the Court to meet with Chief Justice John Roberts and "would not leave (until) he was allowed into the building." According to a police affidavit, Marbrey falsely identified himself as having "higher authority" and showed a congressional report as so-called proof. He told officers, "I'm going inside or you do what you have to do."</p> <p>Marbrey was arrested at 3:09 p.m. Wednesday, minutes before a separate security scare, in which police said they found guns in the car of Tony Payne, 80, who was arrested and facing weapons charges.</p> <p>Marbrey's charging documents do not immediately indicate any connection between the men.</p> <p>During a court appearance Thursday afternoon, Marbrey said he planned to return to the Supreme Court upon his release. During the proceedings, Marbrey invoked sovereign citizen language, in which he questioned the authority of the court and the Justice Department. When asked to identify his defense attorney by the court, Marbrey responded, "My attorney is the attorney general of the United States. It's Merrick Garland. This court has no authority."</p> <p>The judge issued a stay to order him away from the Supreme Court, to which Marbrey responded, "I'm not going to stay away. I'm going there now." He added, "I'm asking you release me right now."</p> <p>Meanwhile, Tony H. Payne, whose white minivan was allegedly stopped or searched, at approximately 3:43 p.m. on Wednesday was expected to appear in D.C. Superior Court Thursday afternoon.</p> <p>Several guns were recovered and three people were detained when authorities investigated the vehicle near the Capitol, U.S. Capitol Police said Wednesday. The three told officers they were there to deliver documents to the Supreme Court, Capitol Police said.</p> <p>Payne, 80, of Tunnel Hill, Georgia, was later arrested on weapons charges, Capitol police said, and his adult grandson was turned over to D.C. Disability Services. A woman who was with them was detained and released.</p>

	<p>Payne is expected to face three charges: unregistered firearm, unregistered ammunition, and carrying a pistol without a license, Capitol Police said.</p> <p>According to Capitol Police, officers noticed a white van was illegally parked and a police dog alerted the officers, prompting a search. One of the men told officers he had guns, which are still banned on Capitol grounds.</p> <p>Officers found two handguns and a shotgun in the vehicle, Capitol Police said, along with a pipe and containers. A hazmat team was also called in to search the van.</p> <p>The nearby Supreme Court was not open on Wednesday, but the area has been under heightened security. An eight-foot fence that had been erected around the court after several justices received threats this spring was removed in August.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Day care workers horror mask to scare kids
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/day-care-workers-horror-mask-scare-children-charged/story?id=91790564
GIST	<p>Five day care workers have been charged with child abuse after a video of them terrifying small children with a scary mask -- similar to the one seen in the "Scream" film franchise -- went viral.</p> <p>The incident occurred at Lil' Blessings Child Care and Learning Center in Hamilton, Mississippi -- approximately 170 miles northeast of the state's capital city of Jackson -- where an undated video of a day care worker wearing a mask can be seen terrorizing children who are screaming and crying and even paralyzed with fear.</p> <p>"Are you being bad? Do I need to take you outside?" the masked day care worker can be heard screaming into the face of a small child as they try to bury their face in their arms on the table.</p> <p>In another moment, the woman in the mask can be seen bending down and shrieking in a crying child's face as she shakes in fear.</p> <p>"We are supposed to be cleaning up, monster," the woman who is filming the video can be heard at one point prompting the woman in the mask who continues stalking the crying and screaming children.</p> <p>At one point a boy can be seen running away while the woman in the mask chases after him as she screams inches from his face.</p> <p>After authorities got wind of what happened at the day care center, they decided to take action.</p> <p>"On Monday October 17, 2022 the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, the County Prosecuting Attorney, and the District Attorney met with the parents of the children involved in the incident at Lil' Blessings Child Care and Learning Center and informed them of the possible criminal charges the law would allow them to pursue," said Monroe County Sheriff Kevin Crook in a statement regarding the incident. "Parents were also given an opportunity to share information they had gathered with MCSO Investigators."</p> <p>At least one set of parents signed felony child abuse affidavits in Monroe County Justice Court on Wednesday and, on Thursday, a judge issued warrants on charges filed against five of the day care workers by multiple sets of parents on behalf of their children.</p> <p>"I was in complete shock of what I witnessed," Katelyn Johnson, mother of a child who attends Lil' Blessings, told ABC News. "Whether they had a mask on or a mask off, their behavior was unacceptable. My blood pressure was raised. It broke my heart for my child. I was angry."</p> <p>"I hope you're enjoying jail and I hope you realize what you have done is serious," Johnson continued. "It is not a joke and it is nothing to laugh at."</p>

	<p>Alyssa Hayes, mother of a young girl at the day care center, echoed Johnson when she spoke to ABC News.</p> <p>"I want them to see the terror on her face because that is what I see every night," she said.</p> <p>Monroe County Sheriff's Office named the offenders in the case as Sierra McCandless, Oci-Anna Kilburn, Jennifer Newman, Shyenne Shelton and Traci Hutson.</p> <p>McCandless, Kilburn, Newman and Shelton each face three counts of felony child abuse for their role in the incident while Hutson faces two charges of failure to report abuse and simple assault against a minor, both misdemeanors.</p> <p>It is unclear if the suspects named in the case have obtained legal representation and the investigation is currently ongoing.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/20 Judge frees 3 wrongfully imprisoned 28yrs
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/men-imprisoned-28-years-freed-judge-vacates-murder/story?id=91792269
GIST	<p>For 28 years, Kunta Gable, Leroy Nelson and Bernell Juluke were wrongfully imprisoned, convicted as teens for a fatal drive-by shooting in New Orleans that they did not commit.</p> <p>The three men were finally freed Wednesday when a state judge vacated their murder convictions after prosecutors cited the interference of two notoriously corrupt police officers in their case.</p> <p>Gable, Nelson and Juluke have reunited with their families and are now adjusting back to normal life.</p> <p>Michael Admirand, Juluke's attorney, said in a statement to ABC News that they are grateful to the court, the prosecutor and the District Attorney's Office's Civil Rights Division for their work in "correcting this grave injustice."</p> <p>"Mr. Juluke maintained his innocence from the moment of his wrongful arrest. I am relieved that he has finally been vindicated, if dismayed that it took so long," Admirand said. "Nothing can make up for the three decades Mr. Juluke and his family lost because of his wrongful conviction, but thanks to the Court's action yesterday, at least they will have their future together."</p> <p>Gable, Nelson and Juluke were arrested on Aug. 22, 1994, shortly after the shooting death of Rondell Santinac at the Desire housing development. Gable and Nelson were 17 at the time while Juluke was 18.</p> <p>The state judge ordered the three men released, responding to a joint motion by a trio of defense lawyers and District Attorney Jason Williams' Civil Rights Division.</p> <p>After an extensive investigation by the division, which involved reviewing records and re-interviewing remaining witnesses, the motion outlined numerous flaws in the original case.</p> <p>According to the district attorney, the state failed to disclose significant evidence that would have exculpated Gable, Nelson and Juluke, including a record of manipulating cases by investigating police officers, Len Davis and Sammie Williams, who were the first on the scene of Santinac's murder.</p> <p>Davis, who headed a small cadre of New Orleans police officers and their drug dealing operation, and Williams were infamous for tampering with murder scene evidence at the housing project to protect their network of local drug dealers and cover up the homicides they committed, according to the district attorney's investigation.</p> <p>Davis was even known as the "Desire Terrorist" for his dealings in the Desire and Florida projects, the motion said. He was later convicted for ordering the death of a woman, Kim Groves, because she had filed a complaint against him in a separate matter.</p>

Return to Top	<p>He was sentenced to the death penalty in 2005 and remains in federal prison.</p> <p>Williams said in a statement to ABC News that Davis was widely known to have "wreaked havoc on marginalized New Orleanians."</p> <p>"There is extensive documented evidence that while operating under color of law he engaged in illegal drug trafficking, framed individuals who got in his way and even went so far as to order the murder of a private citizen who dared to report his systematic abuses," Williams said.</p> <p>Williams called it "unfathomable" that no agency had reviewed any of Davis' cases during his "reign of terror" for 28 years until now.</p> <p>The motion said the state also relied heavily on the testimony of their only eyewitness, Samuel Raiford, who claimed to be driving the vehicle with Santinac in the passenger seat. However, his statements, the motion said, were riddled with inconsistencies.</p> <p>Still, prosecutors "vigorously defended" Raiford's credibility, using it to undermine the defendants' alibi witnesses as well as two additional witnesses claiming to have seen the crime and contending the defendants were not perpetrators, according to the motion.</p>
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